

Folie à Deux

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Folie à Deux

by [vanderloo](#)

Summary

In the mind's eye, Will Graham envisions the Chesapeake Ripper bound and vulnerable, rope around his neck and arms; pinned to a leafless tree. A beast dressed in black fur towers over both men, exhaling its poison into their lungs. Will welcomes it, cherishes it; revels in it. He and the stag are one in the same; they breathe the same air and share the same breath. Just alike. On cue, the stag pushes forward for a final time. The noose tightens and Hannibal Lecter is no more. Bathed in his friend's blood, Will Graham is alone.

Will sees a different route to explore in his manipulation of Hannibal and takes it willingly. But just how willingly, he isn't sure he is ready to admit. Not even to himself.

Begins in "Shiizakana", with writing filling in the blanks. Follows episodes closely until diverges from the canon.

Début

Chapter Notes

It is my belief that Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter were up to more than the show fully explored, and thus, these experiences will be written here. Will Graham is not blind to Hannibal's affections, and takes advantage of it. At least, that is how it begins. But it doesn't stay that way.

As this is my first post on this site, feel free to critique, comment and review. All are welcome. This story does not have a beta.

Story title translation: Folie à Deux - Madness for two

Episode basis title translation: Shiizakana - A traditional Japanese meal with multiple courses

Chapter title translation: Début - A beginning

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Chapter one - Beginning *Chapitre un - Début*

*I'm frozen by the fear in me
Somebody make me feel alive and shatter me*

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In the mind's eye, Will Graham envisions the Chesapeake Ripper bound and vulnerable, rope around his neck and arms; pinned to a leafless tree. A beast dressed in black fur towers over both men, exhaling its poison into their lungs. Will welcomes it, cherishes it; revels in it. He and the stag are one in the same; they breathe the same air and share the same breath. Just alike.

Hannibal doesn't react to the stag; after all, it is Will who holds Hannibal's life in his hands. The stag is under the watchful command of Will Graham and it is loyal and it is willing. The creature huffs out a short breath, the moisture from its lungs creating a vapor in the air similar to smoke. Will whistles and the stag begins to trot forward; the noose around Hannibal's neck tightens, but his face does not change.

Will walks forward, a soft crunch in his step as his boots collide with the ground beneath his feet. He sees white; snow and snowflakes decorate the earth on which he walks, and on the

tree that currently holds Hannibal prisoner. Their picture has been painted; the canvas has been filled with smudges of black and white with nothing but the soft pink of Will's lips to color it.

"Why not appeal to my better nature?" Hannibal asks, not seeming perturbed by the way Will dangles his life in front of him.

"I wasn't aware you had one," Will replies, and it is true. Hannibal's better nature is just another pattern stitched into his person suit.

"No one can be fully aware of another human being unless we love them," Hannibal's response sounds sincere. Will's soft and calculated steps toward his prey falter. "By that love, we see potential in our beloved. Through that love, we allow our beloved to see their potential."

The soft crunching of snow covered boots is enough to root Will in the present moment until he halts his movement entirely. His intimidating advance does nothing to falter Hannibal, "Expressing that love, our beloved's potential comes true."

Through slanted eyes, Will observes Hannibal; through pursed lips, he whistles once more, springing his stag into action. The noose tightens around the Ripper's neck and this time -- for the briefest moment -- his eyes close and a small hint of hurt flashes across his face. But as quickly as Will can recognize it, it is gone, and Hannibal is once again hidden behind a veil.

Will advances again, feet slow and deliberate as his eyes begin to water. From the cold, or from something more, he can't decide. For the smallest moment, he feels torn and Hannibal reads it on his face like an open book.

"I promised you a reckoning," Will hears himself say, voice soft and close to a whisper. And that he had; and this is his reckoning. This is where he will finally take down the Chesapeake Ripper. The first real friend he has ever had, he reminds himself as he gazes at the black skinned creature which now takes Hannibal's place. Its face is solemn, "Here it is."

On cue, the stag pushes forward for a final time. The noose tightens and Hannibal Lecter is no more. Bathed in his friend's blood, Will Graham is alone.



Will opens his eyes and for a second, the room is too bright.

"What did you see?" A voice asks; one that cannot be mistaken for anyone else's. The accent gives Hannibal an edge and it draws people to him and his unique way of speaking.

Will counters the question with one of his own as he pushes his hair back into place, save for a single curl that won't seem to stay obedient, "Do you have any regrets?"

Hannibal's hesitation would be missed by another, but not by Will. "Every choice brings with it the possibility for regret. However, if I choose not to do something it's usually for a good reason."

Will focuses his gaze on the floor and tries to refrain from allowing his mind to be plagued by images from his daydream. He looks tired, and he is. Nightmares threaten his sleeping schedule and exhaust him; he pales in comparison to the pristine condition that Hannibal keeps himself in. Will has both hands firmly rooted to the armrests of his chair, "I am... riddled with regrets."

"A life without regret would be no life at all."

Will's eyebrows raise in submission; the statement is correct but it doesn't comfort him. He is riddled with unwanted thoughts and they rush through his mind like insects, burrowing their way deep into his brain so much so that Will can see them every time he closes his eyes. "I regret what I did in the stable."

"Then you are lucky I was there," is the only response that Hannibal offers. Will sees straight through the act. His eyes slowly travel their way back up before they are met with a pair of deep maroon ones. Instability creeps up on him like a ghost.

"Oh, no. No, no; being lucky isn't the same as making a mistake." A sharp intake of breath does nothing to help Will calm himself. Hannibal's head tilts slightly to the side, as if to goad Will into saying more. His eyes have turned a darker shade of brown.

"My mistake was allowing you to stop me."

"So it's not pulling the trigger than you regret," Hannibal prompts in a tone that is close to a purr, "it's not pulling it effectively."

Finding truth in his words sends a tremor to Will's core. The beast that Hannibal has awakened inside of him becomes stronger with every minute they spend together. It snarls and tears at Will's insides, and it stings like fire. His words are shaky, at best, "That would be more accurate."

Hannibal is quiet for what feels like an eternity; they stare at one another and everything else in the room becomes non-existent. Something in Hannibal's expression has changed, and softened his features. From what, Will can't decide. "You must adapt your behavior to avoid feeling like this again, Will."

Give me something, he wants to scream. Something to incriminate Hannibal is all Will needs to take him down. Hannibal's art of persuasion is not something that can get him arrested, yet that is all he seems to be offering to Will. Hannibal had even prevented Will from killing a man whom they both knew deserved it. Even in the psychological profile Will had meticulously created in order to lure Hannibal into his own prison cell, he couldn't seem to predict the other man's actions. And the line between Will's own persona and the one he had created is wearing thin; it is becoming hard to differentiate between the two. Something in Hannibal's words gnaw away at him; it is food for thought and it leaves Will with a bitter taste in his mouth.

"Adapt. Evolve." Will's eyes harden as he lowers his tone to a whisper; the vulnerability he felt before now ceasing to exist, "Become."

"Yes," Hannibal responds quietly, pride evident in the way he holds himself. His eyes reflect the crackle of flames from the fireplace and for a second, Will feels himself get lost in them, "Can you imagine a version of events you wouldn't have regretted?"

As Will opens his mouth to reply, their conversation is interrupted by his phone ringing. Their bubble intruded, Will shakes his head out of the trance that Hannibal had coaxed him into. The room is warmer than he remembers; the lights dimmer. "Sorry, I," he fishes his phone out of his trouser pocket and focuses his attention to it, "It should be on silent."

Hannibal says nothing; the disappointment that he did not get to hear what Will's response would have been will distract him for days. And it is a fact he is painfully aware of.

"It's Jack. I need to take this."

"Of course. You may use the waiting room." Hannibal rises to his feet before Will does, hand extended as he shows Will politely to the door, "It would appear we have run over your time for your appointment."

Despite his words, there is nothing in Hannibal's tone which conveys that he is bothered by Will occupying his time. And this is a fact Will is acutely aware of. He nods once, holding the phone to his ear and not moving to leave the room. Trust; he needs Hannibal to trust him. And if that means letting him in on Jack and his conversations, then so be it.

Hannibal's expression does not change as he lowers his extended hand, the urge to politely excuse himself is far too overpowering to ignore. The room feels larger than what it had before now that he and Will had ended their conversation. Hannibal busies himself with the task of closing the drapes and shielding his office from the offending street lamps and the shadows they create on the office floor. He can hear Will speak calmly to Jack from where he remains sitting in his chair; an intriguing choice to reject Hannibal's kind offer to be excused. But whatever reason Will has, Hannibal feels a small sense of gratitude.

The conversation lasts no longer than four minutes; but to Will it feels much longer than that. Talking to Jack Crawford has become a chore over the past few weeks he had been working his way into Hannibal's psyche, under Jack's supervision. Their conversations are neither engulfing nor remotely intriguing like they had been in the past -- Will knows this is Hannibal's influence. Will has allowed it for the time being; alienating Jack had been his first act in transforming into the killer Hannibal had created. Or thought he had created. With a mild sigh, the phone is slid back into his pocket and his hand rubs at his eyes.

"It would appear you are growing tired of Jack Crawford," Hannibal notes from somewhere in the room. Will opens his eyes, still blurry from rubbing them, until the other man comes sharply into focus. He cannot see the other man's face; his back is turned as he gazes out of the window, one hand on the drapes Will assumes he intended to close.

Will rises to his feet and feels a knot forming in his stomach, "It's that obvious?"

"Only to me."

Will falls silent at Lecter's response. There appears to be something troubling the other man, but Will doesn't pry. But he feels a soft tinge in his chest; a want to understand what the other is thinking. It isn't a new feeling, but it had grown considerably in the passing weeks. Will isn't worried, not yet. He knew when he agreed to help entrap Hannibal that he would have to alter his personality. Having not anticipated how easy it had been was where Will lost his self-confidence.

Hannibal's head turns to the right slightly as Will comes to stand with him, slightly behind him. Together they gaze out into the night, the street lights dilating their pupils until they are nothing but dots on a vast canvas of colors. Hannibal had discarded his jacket somewhere throughout Will and his conversation, something Will had failed to take notice of. It isn't until he stands as close as he does that Will can realize how strong Lecter actually is. Strong arms and hips of a swimmer fit into his shirt and waistcoat like they are tailored for him; they probably are. Will looks down at himself and his second rate shirt and trousers and feels self conscious for a short moment.

"Is something the matter, Will?" Hannibal's voice pulls Will out of his thoughts and he is thankful for it. After a courteous nod, Will returns his gaze to the passing cars outside.

"Last night was a missed opportunity."

Hannibal's attention is suddenly fully on Will, eyes landing on him. Will does not return his gaze, instead remaining focused on the soft snowfall in the world outside the office. Lecter remains silent, simply waiting for Will to continue.

"To feel like I did when I killed Garrett Jacob Hobbs," Will admits finally, realization hitting him that his words are not only truth but also do not frighten him. He feels disturbingly calm; it irks him to continue, voice a mere whisper from behind Hannibal, "To feel like I did when I thought I'd killed you."

There is a deliberate pause and the earth stands still. Hannibal's eyes burn through Will like an uncontrollable fire that spreads all the way to his midsection and heats up his intestines. Lecter's gaze is personal; it is dripping in intimacy and intensity. He sees the other man lick his lips from his peripheral and it makes Will nauseous.

"What does that feel like?" Hannibal asks, voice below a whisper and dripping with curiosity.

"I feel..." Will pauses to gather himself, hands shaking and body soon to follow, but he does not falter. He meets Hannibal's eyes, "a quiet sense of power."

"Good," Hannibal purrs in response, and suddenly a hand is on Will's shoulder and Hannibal bows his head, similar to when he had confessed to hiding Nicholas Boyle's body, "Remember that feeling."

Hannibal's proximity is enough to push Will into unease, but he hides it as best he can. He can't afford to slip up now; no matter how dangerous it is becoming. He is in danger of losing himself, yet he can't bring himself to care. Part of him believes it is to catch Hannibal and to

avenge the people he had done wrong; but another part of him knows he is already under Hannibal's spell.

Only time would tell as they stood, looking out into the night, a hand on Will's shoulder acting as his grip on reality. Behind them, the stag stands still and observes.



The air is cold and nipping to the extremities; snow has finally stopped falling with the decrease in temperature. When it was too cold to snow it was too cold to do much else, but evidently, not too cold to kill. Two corpses, metres apart, limbs severed. Arterial spray destroys the clean canvas of snow on the ground as Will tries his best to step over most of it. Jack has the face of a man who is too old for this type of thing, and it shows in his posture; shoulders slumped and legs wide apart.

“What happened here?” Jack asks, voice only confirming Will’s thoughts even further, “These people were butchered. What sort of animal could do this kind of thing?”

Will remains silent; he has the feeling Jack’s question had been rhetorical. Though it does beg the question, what kind of animal could do this? A man and a woman -- a couple, by assumption -- torn to pieces and left to rot. It certainly isn’t a personal kill.

Jack claps his hands once and his gloves only seem to make it louder than it needs to be. “Clear the scene. Let’s move!”

Will keeps his hands in his coat pockets. In the rush to get out of bed and leave his house this morning, he had picked up his scarf and watched his gloves fall to the floor, obviously after he’d thrown everything in a pile the night before, but he had no time to stop to gather them. He was running late as it was.

His scarf is pulled up to his chin, and it compliments the way his coat fits into the solid curves of his body. You’re beginning to look like Hannibal, Will, Jack had told him that morning when he’d first stepped into Jack’s car. And it is true. He has to make the other man believe that he is changing, evolving and becoming. But how thin the line stretches between what Will knows is right and what feels right to Will is almost invisible.

The scattering of FBI workers bring him back to the present. Shaking himself out of his thoughts, Will closes his eyes and lets his ability consume him.

When his eyes re-open it is dark and the stars are out; there’s a small source of light from a campfire that is just visible from the trees in which Will stands. By his side, the presence of the stag cannot go unnoticed. It huffs quietly, presumably to fight the cold air, and leans forward on its front hooves; ready. It is the beast that carries out the killing.

Two people, arm in arm, make their way slowly towards the camp fire. They are dressed as if they are returning from a dinner party; took a small detour to admire the scenery. A detour that will cost them their lives. The man is dressed in a black and white tuxedo with a white

scarf, one that Will can envision spattered with blood next to his severed torso. The woman, whom Will can only partially see, is dressed in a cream colored fur coat, topped with a beige fur hat. For a brief moment, Will wonders if the killer would see her as opportunity for a mate, with all that fur decorating her form, but dismisses it to the dark recess of his mind as a cold and inappropriate joke.

The stag whinnies with impatience to which Will offers a short turn of his head, not breaking eye contact with his prey. The couple pause by the campfire to warm themselves and share a passionate kiss. A perfect time to attack is whilst the prey is distracted.

“Kill.” Will says with authority, and it’s all the permission the stag needs. The beast charges for the unknowing meat in front of it. Will can hear the tear of fabric and flesh, antlers tearing through skin and bone and vital organs; it makes him feel alive. Taking a life exhilarates him and makes him feel like he is who he needs to be; an animal, a beast. His perception changes until he is in fact the beast; he has been all along. Antlers sprout out of his skin from each inter vertebral disc in his spine and his clothes are gone with nothing but the heat from a kill to warm him. He rips into his prey’s abdomen with his mouth, pulling up with skin in his teeth and blood dripping down him. It smothers him and he revels in it with hunger in his eyes. He feels whole; the best he has felt in a long time.

When his eyes reopen he is standing in the middle of the crime scene, palms sweaty and nose running. The canvas returns to white around him as his pupils adjust. A brief check with the back of his hand confirms that his nose is bleeding. Jack offers him a soft piece of fabric withdrawn from his coat pocket and Will thanks him for it, briefly wondering how long the other man had been next to him.

“What did you see?” Jack’s tone makes it painfully clear that he is aware Will has looked too far; far enough to cause bodily reaction. Will feels a small stab at his stomach from his own body betraying him.

“It’s not an animal, it’s,” there is a pause whilst Will collects himself, settling for scratching his day old stubble with his left hand and holding the fabric to his nose with his right, “it’s a man who wants to be an animal.”

“Does he believe he’s an animal?”

Will looks off into the distance; into the trees where he envisioned he’d stood, “It’s not what he believes, it’s what he imagines.”

Jack is becoming impatient, growing tired of how the other man’s actions appear to be condescending. It reminds him of how he feels whenever Doctor Lecter is in a room with him, “What does he want?”

“To maul,” Brows furrowed, Will offers a small frown as he and Jack slowly advance in the direction of Jack’s car. His own words give him more of a chill than any cold temperatures ever could, “It’s not personal; he doesn’t know them and he doesn’t need to know them. They’re just meat to him.”

Thinking back to his vision, and how it made him feel, he closes his eyes and can only see red behind his eyelids. “Prey.”

Jack’s gaze falters as he side-eyes Will with undeniable scrutiny, “This kind of psychosis doesn’t just slip through the system. Somewhere, someone would have noticed this.”

And it’s true. No respectable psychologist or psychiatrist could have overlooked this type of mental disorder. “If it is psychosis he’s... got inside of it somehow,” he grimaces as he and Jack look over the splattered blood trails which pollute the soft snow, “tamed it. Made a suit out of it.”

A suit. Perhaps a literal suit, too. To design and create such a suit -- one that can mimic the killings of a wild animal, be it bear or wolf -- would require more than basic knowledge and craftsmanship. “He’s an engineer. Or he,” he pauses, searching his brain for further solutions, “he understands engineering. Knows how to build, he built his beast.”

Jack looks at him with curiosity, but even he can’t disguise his disgust. Someone having used their own creation to kill an innocent man, and now a couple. Jack can’t imagine the sort of monster who can do this sort of thing. Despite his behavioural science class days he still isn’t able to fully wrap his head around this form of psychosis. At least, not as good as Will Graham can.

“He’s a student of predators.” Will interrupts Jack’s thoughts, sounding a little more disturbed than before. It sounds like someone else Will knows, and knows very well. He thanks Jack again for the napkin and hands it back to him; surprisingly, Jack doesn’t seem to mind about the blood now staining it. Jack looks away as Will’s words strike him hard in the gut. Predator and prey; sounds a lot like Hannibal and Will. It leaves a bitter taste in his mouth to think of Will as prey or think about the danger that Jack has put him in. But, no, he can’t afford to think that way. And Will had agreed to it, after all.



Will doesn’t know why he does, but he ends up going to Hannibal’s office. He tells himself it’s only to talk; to goad Hannibal into admitting perhaps he killed the couple. But another part of Will’s brain knows better. This part of his brain admits it might be for support. He feels like he is losing touch with reality; the melody of sanity and insanity blending together and making a delightful song that only Will can hum along to. But he is confident Hannibal could learn the beat.

He sits in a green shirt, having removed his coat and scarf, sticking out like a sore thumb from where he is perched on Hannibal’s writing desk. A small gesture with a sense of intimacy; Hannibal wouldn’t let just anyone sit on his furniture. Will is the exception.

Hannibal is behind him, writing notes down into a small leather journal regarding his previous patient whom Will had almost walked in on. The room smells of expensive perfume, though not his taste, presumably from a female patient. The aroma is strong enough that Will can feel it on his tongue as it plagues his taste buds. It tastes bitter, but about what, he can’t

hazard a guess. It's easy to forget sometimes that Hannibal has other patients; that the man's entire career does not revolve around Will.

Will shakes his head, face stoic and unmoving as he tries to push these thoughts to a dark circle of his mind. He lets them nest there for the time being, knowing they will only creep up on him later.

The sound of pen against paper is the only thing Will uses to calm himself. He forces himself to think about the murder of the couple from this morning; how their body parts had been torn and discarded in multiple directions without care or delicacy. A passing thought plagues Will with the idea that his mind is much the same; a shattered tea cup of emotion, thoughts, feelings, and perception of good and evil scattered around inside his head unable to put itself back together.

"No beast is more savage than man when possessed with power answerable to his own rage," Lecter's voice echoes through Will's psyche, pulling him back to the present in one short sentence. The sound of pen on paper stops, and Will can only assume that Hannibal has finally finished analyzing his previous session.

"It's not rage," Will replies, voice clear but quiet. His hands are behind him, resting on Lecter's desk as he uses them to hold himself up. Behind him, he hears Hannibal's journal close, "Rage is an emotional response to being provoked. This is," his voice slurs slightly, "this is something else."

The paper rustling behind him does nothing to calm Will, and neither does Hannibal's seemingly uninterested voice, "What is it?"

Will hesitates as he thinks Hannibal's question through in his head. The killer feels like an animal, or like he wants to become one. Maybe he thought he should have been one all along. And animals run on instinct. Will turns his body toward Hannibal, stretching around to look at the other man, "Instinct?"

His response is enough to cause Hannibal's actions to falter as he organizes a few stray papers on his desk. He looks up at Will and his eyes soften.

"It's how he thinks." Will adds as he becomes a little unsure of himself under Hannibal's gaze.

"The way any animal thinks depends on limitations of mind and body," is Hannibal's curt response as he returns to his papers. It certainly doesn't give Will confidence when the other man's tone sounds extremely bored, "If we learn our limitations too soon, we never learn our power."

Will blinks and recognizes what Hannibal means instantly. He has always assumed his ability would limit him, or perhaps prevent him, from taking part in a lot of things in his life. Becoming FBI is one of them, on top of making friends. Yet Jack Crawford had proved him wrong in the former, and Hannibal had proved him wrong in the latter. Shaking his head a little, Will decides not to voice his thoughts and instead remains on the topic of the killer.

“He tore his victims apart; I’d say he learned his power.”

“He claimed his power,” Hannibal, seemingly done with reorganizing his desk, moves elegantly around the furniture, a deep exhale upon his lips. He undoes his suit coat before sitting next to Will, perched on his own desk, centimeters apart, “Can you imagine tearing someone apart?”

Yes, Will aches to say. He imagines tearing Hannibal Lecter apart limb by limb, scattering the body parts and bathing in his blood. Hannibal appears to have perhaps caught onto Will’s train of thought, but if he does he does not comment on it. His hands are clasped in front of him, posture perfect compared to Will’s slumping shoulders.

“Or would you prefer to use a gun?”

Will swallows but it is not audible, “Guns lack intimacy.”

Accepting his response, Hannibal nods with an unreadable expression, “You set an event in motion with a gun, you don’t complete it.”

Hannibal is right, but Will is beginning to wonder if Hannibal could ever be wrong. Will remembers shooting and killing Garrett Jacob Hobbs like it was this morning, even if he knows better. It wasn’t an intimate death; it was murder. It lacked passion, Will thought, even if the thought shakes him to the core. He can still feel Abigail’s blood on his hands to act as a constant reminder of the responsibility he had felt for her, now replaced with the responsibility he feels for her death. Briefly, Will hopes Hannibal can feel blood on his palms too.

Will briefly wonders if that’s why Hannibal didn’t use guns on his victims; because it lacked intimacy.

“After everything, you still believe I am guilty?” Hannibal asks and it startles Will, obviously having voiced his thoughts without realizing. Anger sparks inside of him and he snaps at the other man, cutting off what else he had to say.

“Stop right there,” Will says, shifting in his perch and placing his palms on his thighs, “You might have to pretend, but I don’t.”

Hannibal is quiet for a long moment, making a small decision within himself to neither accept or deny Will’s accusation. It is evident that he hadn’t meant to voice his opinion, anyway. “No, you don’t.”

He pauses, thinking, then says, “Not with me.”

Will turns his head, catching Hannibal’s eyes and holding them there, locked against his own. Words hard and threatening, he doesn’t blink, “I don’t expect you to admit anything. You can’t.” Forbid the Chesapeake Ripper to ever take credit for his own murders. “But I prefer sins of omission to downright lies, Doctor Lecter. Don’t lie to me.”

There is a long silence as both men look at one another. Hannibal appears taken back by Will's words -- something Will revels in whilst it lasts. It feels like they are sat closer together than before. The air in the room is thin and Will tries to regulate his heart beat; he can hear it in his ears. It beats to Will's melody.

"Will you return the courtesy?" Hannibal asks quietly, looking at Will with more than a professional curiosity, "Why have you resumed your therapy?"

It is a difficult question to answer for Will. He can't give anything away; can't let Hannibal in on what he and Jack are playing at. Yet he can't divert too far from the truth either as Lecter will be able to see through him. For a second, Will feels as transparent as a fragile glass. "Can't just talk to any psychiatrist about what's kicking around inside my head."

"Do you fantasize about killing me?" Hannibal's question hangs in the air with Will's response fast on its heels.

"Yes."

Hannibal leans toward Will unintentionally, feeling a need to be closer to Will, both physically and mentally. He doesn't seem to be phased negatively by this news. But Will knows he probably already assumes as much, but still; there is a distinct curiosity in his voice that makes Will doubt himself, "Tell me, how would you do it?"

Will looks down at his now fisted hands and closes his eyes. He envisions himself and the black creature standing alone in the room. The creature looks saddened but Will doesn't feel pity or remorse. He beats the beast down onto its back, feeling its face crack like marble under his knuckles. He beats it until it bleeds, and Will is too filled and overcome with fury that he doesn't notice the beast morph into Hannibal. The other man lays under Will, pinned down by his knees, and smiles through blood stained teeth, but there's something in his smile that heats up Will's torso. An unreadable emotion that he can't name.

Will re-opens his eyes and refuses to look at Hannibal, voice slightly above a whisper "With my hands."

Hannibal's eyes are burning a hole through Will's skull, prodding at him and goading him further. But Will doesn't give the man the satisfaction. There's a sense of power in having the last word. There's a sense of power in not giving Hannibal what he wants. Being able to be in control of Hannibal is exhilarating, at least to the extent he can control Hannibal. The other man has only allowed an obstructed look at his canvas; a partial painting of madness without detail, hidden behind a veil. A burning desire deep in Will's gut lets itself be known as he aches to understand Hannibal. He wants Hannibal to let him see his entire work, not just a teaser. But he will need to work for this piece of art, and he knows it.

The other man feels closer now than before, and this time it's because he is. Hannibal has tilted his body toward Will, making Will want to shy away and retreat in on himself, "What does it feel like?" Hannibal asks, quiet curiosity bubbling in his voice, "When you think about killing me?"

Will responds in the only way he knows how, "Intimate."

Hannibal's smile is worth it. It is both parts evil as it is charming, and Will can fully understand how Hannibal had slithered his way through the system time and time again. A clever mask; a veil covering his true nature. It is a dark mask on the surface of Hannibal's psyche which protects him from the likes of Jack Crawford, and for now, the likes of Will Graham. A glimpse under the veil could bring Will one step closer to taking down the cannibal before him.

In one swift and fluid motion, Hannibal lifts his left hand and touches the side of Will's face, gripping it with his palm. His fingertips ghost on the shell of Will's ear and he fights a shiver. He can hear his heart race in his ears. His stomach convulses much like the time Hannibal had done a similar gesture in the stable, but this time is... different. Intimate. Their eyes lock, and time stands still. The sound of rain hitting the windows ceases to exist, and it is just Will and Hannibal in the room.

"Would that feel more satisfying than pulling a trigger?" Hannibal asks, thumb sliding across Will's cheek and pulling his skin with it for a short moment. Will must be sweating; his skin is sticking to Lecter's hand.

"Yes."

Hannibal doesn't miss a beat, and he makes a point of not missing the way Will's hands shake on his knees, "When you sent that man to kill me, were you imagining killing me yourself? Living vicariously through him as if," There is a short pause where Hannibal hesitates, exhaling a breath that Will doesn't understand, "your hands tightened the noose around my neck? Or were you simply hiding?"

Hiding, Will's thoughts mock him. Although, when he was sitting on that prison bed staring at the sink, he thought of Lady Macbeth. When she washed her hands, she washed them with blood; couldn't take the guilt that plagued her after being responsible for a murder even though she had not physically committed it. Will had understood her in that moment when he turned the faucet and blood poured from it, filling the sink and spilling over onto the prison floor. It sank into the tiles and soaked Will's shoes.

In defense, Will retorts, "I wasn't hiding from anything the first time I tried to kill you."

Hannibal's hand tightens and holds Will in place, "You were hiding. Behind the gun."

The worse part is that Hannibal is right. Again. He had hidden behind a gun in Garrett Jacob Hobb's kitchen, shaking with it in his hands as he pointed it at Hannibal Lecter, now the Chesapeake Ripper. He had been so blind. He had been so blind. But he couldn't bring himself to kill a friend, could he? Not that he had the chance to decide when Jack Crawford had found them and shot Will in Hannibal's defense.

Hannibal had everybody fooled.

Will says nothing in response to the other man's words, letting his silence be his answer. Hannibal has won this round. The sound of rain returns as quickly as it had disappeared, and Hannibal's office is suddenly warm and full of detail. Decor which expresses personality and

style; none of it a mask. Perhaps Hannibal's interior design choices could tell Will more about him than Hannibal's words could.

A soft thumb brushes over his cheek and returns Will to the present, attention back on the man before him. He can feel Hannibal's warm breath on his face, "You must allow yourself to be intimate with your instincts, Will."

Hannibal's eyes are hungry, but something is masking that hunger. Will recognizes it as need; need for what? Companionship, the need to be understood? Will's brain searches for answers. "Do you?"

"Yes," Hannibal replies significantly. His voice is as smooth as the whiskey they had shared a few nights before, over a meal Hannibal had cooked for them. Probably a human carcass. Will tries not to think about it.

"I need to know if you're going to try to kill me again, Will."

The question catches Will off guard. But his response is on the tip of his tongue. "I don't want to kill you again, Doctor Lecter." Will closes his eyes and reaches forward inside the dark place in their minds that they share and lifts Lecter's veil, now looking at the man in front of him for what feels like the first time. "Not now that I finally find you interesting."

Lecter smiles and that unidentifiable emotion is still in his eyes; it makes Will feel nauseous. The thumb on his cheek trails down over his lips and onto his chin where it remains. Outside, the rain has finally stopped, and the game that Lecter and Will have been playing has changed. Will isn't sure he is prepared for round two.



Acting on a tip from Hannibal, Jack Crawford visits Baltimore's Museum of Natural History. It is a long drive from the station to the museum which would have been cut a lot shorter if Will Graham hadn't insisted on joining him. Jack had almost refused to picking the other man up at a local bookstore when he had called, he still wishes he had as he and Will enter the building. The younger man looks tired; looks like he's suffering from a form of internal turmoil that picks away at Jack's mind; like picking at a dead piece of skin next to a fingernail. It hurts but in the end the outcome is worth it and the nail is no longer unseemly. Jack hopes the same can be applied to Will's brilliant mind. It is almost closing hours but the thought doesn't worry Jack. If what Hannibal had told him is true, then the suspect will still be there. Hannibal had taken Jack aside a day prior and revealed that he had in fact treated a patient in the past who seemed like the missing piece of their puzzle. Randall Tier, who works at the museum and whose specialty just happens to be assembling skeletons of prehistoric animals, with very large, and very sharp teeth. It is practically gift wrapped, and Jack is aware Will senses it too.

The tip from Lecter is ridiculous to Will. Of course Hannibal treated a patient with the same form of psychosis. Of course said patient had now succumbed to his murderous influence. This has Hannibal Lecter written all of it in permanent marker. Will moves to adjust his

glasses before he remembers he doesn't wear them any more; he has closed them away along with his old persona. Glasses reveal the layer of vulnerability beneath his thick skin, and he will be damned if he will let Hannibal take advantage of it again.

The two men place a request at the reception to speak to Tier personally, studying the skeletons of past beasts that plagued the earth as they wait. The room isn't that well lit for a museum, save for small spotlights on each corner of the exhibits. There are a small amount of people in the skeletal section, most of them students and most of them uninterested in speaking. It suits Will perfectly. He remembers spending a lot of his time as a teenager in museums like this; there is something compelling about being there and being able to experience history as if it is right before his eyes, in lieu of social interactions that one would expect in college.

"Reception told me you wanted to speak to me."

The voice of a young man echoes through Will's thoughts from where he stands with his hands clasped before him. He hasn't bothered to discard his coat; something tells him this will be a short visit. He will profile Randall Tier and that will be that. Not enough evidence for a conviction, or at least, not yet.

Randall Tier is shorter than Will, but not by much. Dressed in a lab coat for his profession, he looks emaciated. A common trait among those with eating disorders is wearing clothing a few sizes larger than their frame; and Will notices this in Randall. Too busy with his creations to eat, he imagines. Will faces away from Tier, instead admiring his handiwork. Randall's creations, now the museums exhibits, are nothing short of exquisite.

"Ah, Randall Tier," Jack says, removing his hat politely and withdrawing his badge from his inner coat pocket with the other hand, "Special Agent Jack Crawford, FBI." For a moment, Randall looks concerned but it soon drips away from him and gets replaced by a small sense of consternation when Jack introduces Will Graham.

Randall Tier recognizes the name, but nowadays no one doesn't. Will curses Freddie Lounds for it. Tabloid journalists deserve a special place in hell.

"Uh, did you," Jack begins, finding it hard to look for the correct term to describe it, "put all that together?" Assemble, Will wants to say, but restrains himself. He had learned not to correct Jack's vocabulary before.

"Yes, I did," Randall responds shortly.

"Nice work." Jack offers a small, sharp nod to Tier's handiwork, sparing a short glance at Will who seems miles away as he observes a few of the other structures across the room. Jack turns his attention back to Tier, pointing at the skeletal structure before them, "What is that?"

The skull in question has relatively sharp teeth, but not ones long enough to shred limb from limb. Will can tell it is a cave bear from where he stands, half way across the room, before Randall identifies it for himself.

"That is a cave bear."

“You put together a lot of cave bears?” Jack asks.

Randall’s face turns smug; he is proud of his work. “I put them together, I take them apart, put them back together again.”

Jack doesn’t miss a beat, quietly sending thanks to Hannibal for the tip this time. “So you understand their mechanics and how they’re,” he glances toward Will, “engineered?”

Randall doesn’t miss the silent exchange between Jack and Will Graham, but he doesn’t acknowledge it. “Oh, we understand a lot about cave bears.”

From the other side of the room, Will listens to Randall intently, forcing himself not to get lost in the observation of the skeletal structures of a mammoth.

“Their fossils have been found in the tens of thousands, all over southern Europe.” Randall uses his hand to show Jack the extensive number of bones the cave bear presents. “Very common.”

Jack doesn’t bother feigning his interest, and Will finds it unbelievably rude of him. “The reason I ask is because a,” he gestures to the skull before them, “a cave bear skull was used very recently as a murder weapon.”

To his surprise, Randall doesn’t seem at all dismayed by what Jack has said. “Prehistoric jaws and claws are designed to do what they do best.”

“The victims were torn apart.”

Both men look toward the new voice as Will finally speaks up, re announcing his presence. Will avoids both of their gazes, instead focusing on the skull of the late sabertooth tiger. Randall’s head has snapped to attention and he is now studying Will intently. Perhaps he can tell that Will can profile him from miles away; he senses danger like an animal senses it is being hunted.

“Used the right tool for the job.” Will observes, eyes straight ahead.

Randall doesn’t stop looking at him, eyes as cold and emotionless as stone, “Look inside the skull and you’ll find what the job is.” What is said causes Will’s neck to twitch; Tier is clearly a lot smarter than Will had given him original credit for. Will envisions Randall inside a suit much like the skeleton of a cave bear, eyes closed and breath steady. His chest and lungs heave with each breath; a breathing pattern much less natural for a human and more common in a predator. Once he envisions it, he can’t see Randall any other way.

“You have a history of trouble with things inside your head,” Jack begins, an accusation on his lips, “Isn’t that right, Mr. Tier?”

Will watches both of them; one man and one beast; from behind the saber-tooth skeleton. It provides enough space for him to remain comfortable. The silence is deafening between all three of them, until Randall speaks.

“Is that what this is about? You think I killed someone with a fossil?”

To this, Jack offers a shrug, face unamused. He looks old for his age, Will thinks. He can imagine Randall tossing a cave bear skull at Jack to mock him. He keeps his eyes steady, not looking in their direction in order to hide the way the corners of his lips twist up in response to his internal joke.

“I had an identity disorder.” Will hears it as though Hannibal is in the room with them, but a quick turn of his head disproves it as Randall is the one who is speaking, “The doctors told me the internal map of my body didn’t match reality. Know what it’s like when the skin you’re wearing doesn’t fit?”

For a moment, Will sees himself in Randall’s shoes. He doesn’t fit in, not here or anywhere. His skin is not his own and he is painfully aware of it. The unsettling and overpowering need to hunt and maul create a bubble of fire in his gut. For a moment, Will sees himself and Randall on the same level; both fighting with the same condition. The only common denominator between them being their psychiatrist. Will fights a grimace, “I can imagine.”

“I know who I am now.” Randall replies significantly, eyes suddenly on Will, anger in his voice. His words chill Will to the bone. “I’m doing much better. I’m socializing. I take my medication. I’m employed and I work very hard.” There is a pause, leaving the other two men on their toes before Randall finally says, “And I’m proof that mental illness is treatable.”

Will looks away; he can’t hear it anymore. He spares a glance at Jack and lets his feet carry him out of the museum. The air is cold as it hits his cheeks like a thin sheet of ice. It assaults his nasal passages and makes him cough a couple times. Randall’s words are fresh in his mind. I know who I am now. Will shakes his head, begging his mind to not relate. I’m doing much better. But he is, isn’t he? Will feels much more sure of himself, he is no longer feeling unstable. For the first real time in his life he can see and think clearly, and it is all thanks to his psychiatrist. Will feels like spitting, but he doesn’t, settling for covering his mouth over with his scarf and shoving his hands into his coat pockets. It isn’t snowing; not yet, but it is going to. Will feels like he needs the snow to clear the canvas of his mind. He needs to restart; he needs a kickstart.

He thinks quietly to himself, counting his steps as he walks back into downtown Baltimore, knowing Jack won’t expect him to wait around. And sure enough, he receives a text from the older man pertaining to his whereabouts. Will responds politely, not allowing himself to type what he really feels, and puts his phone back into his trouser pocket. It is finally dark out and the street lights create small circles of orange on the sidewalk beneath Will’s feet and beyond. Night time is much more calming and much more peaceful for Will; nothing to excite the mind’s eye and divert him from his course of thought. There is no one on the sidewalk in front of him, and a quick look back confirms that Will is alone. Like always. Not always, someone says in his mind, but it isn’t Will; it’s Hannibal. He can hear the soft smile in Hannibal’s words and they cut through him like scissors through paper. He feels flimsy enough.

He makes it back to the bookstore moments before it closes down for the evening, managing to discreetly remove his car from the parking lot undetected, having run over his time on the meter. No one notices and Will thinks for a second that his luck might be improving, but he

doesn't hold his breath. He makes it home in just under an hour, the roads icy but empty. The chains to his tires he had fitted make it much easier to drive.

The dogs bark to greet him when he emerges from the car with a brown grocery bag full of dog food cans, food for himself and a book he'd managed to purchase before Jack had arrived to pick him up. His legs are stiff going up the steps to his door, having not moved them much for an hour in the clammy car, but they are soon forgotten when he is greeted by his multitude of dogs.

"Hey, guys," He says, hurriedly making his way to the kitchen to feed his hungry friends. Buster jumps at his legs and demands attention, to which Will complies, which is a mistake as all dogs seem to have the same idea. But the whining from Winston tells Will that they probably need the bathroom.

He lets them all outside the front door and watches them scramble, the smaller dogs struggling to jump through the snow. It makes Will smile to himself. Ten minutes later, when most dogs have returned inside, Will has already laid out their bowls and filled them with food. Having shrugged out of his coat and scarf, Will stands in a simple dark green shirt, hair disheveled and untamed. He has no one to impress when he isn't with Hannibal. He doesn't cook himself anything, having lost his appetite from his conversation with Randall Tier. The man is a killer and that much is obvious, but Will can't shake himself free of the thought that it had been Hannibal's doing. The idea that Will had not been Hannibal's first to drive to kill; that there could have been others. He feels foolish for not thinking it before, having overestimated Hannibal's interest in him. Perhaps he really is just another puppet for Hannibal to play with, to push and pull at his strings until something interesting happens. For a long moment, Will recognizes the ache in his midsection as hurt, and tries to fight it. He shakes his head and makes his way into his bedroom

That's when the dogs begin to bark. Hearing clawing at the front door, Will returns to the main room with a furrowed brow. He looks at his dogs, curiosity pulling him from his thoughts, the knot in his stomach momentarily forgotten. Serah, his oldest and usually calmest dog, is up on her hind legs and is clawing at the door. The others are barking aside from Winston who begins to growl, tail rigid and eyes toward the door, and this is when Will begins to feel uneasy. Animals can sense danger before humans can. Will maneuvers around his animals, hand going for the handle as he peers out of the window, dogs yelping in his ears. He opens the door a crack and Buster acts first; it is an out of character action for the animal as Will is used to him cowering behind the others, but this time he takes off running out the door that is still ajar. But not this time; Buster runs out of the house, past Will and the others, and sprints off into the night toward the trees.

"Hey!" Will shouts after the small animal, tension in his neck as he squeezes through the small gap of the door to go after his dog, "Buster! Buster!" The cold hits him like a fast car and engulfs him, and for a moment he wishes he were an animal too, with the protection of a fur coat to push him forward. He stops at the end of his porch and watches with worry as Buster doesn't listen to him, running further away through the snow. When he loses sign of Buster, Will hurries back inside. Something isn't right. He hears his other dogs whine and that is when he decides that something is definitely wrong. There is something endangering him. He takes his rifle from where it is hidden under his desk, knocking over some fishing

equipment as he does so. It doesn't cross his mind as he moves hastily back outside, grabbing his fishing coat from the back of a chair as he goes. He shrugs into it messily, but it doesn't matter. What matters is getting Winston back and killing whatever is threatening them.

Once his feet hit the snow he takes off running in the direction of Buster's tracks, struggling to maintain his footing with the harsh weather. "Buster!" He tries again, voice loud and echoing throughout the trees as he makes his way through them, "Buster!"

When he hears the painful whimper of an animal, his blood runs cold. He freezes in his tracks when he sees Buster laying, shivering in the snow. There is blood on his front paw and Will sees red when he blinks his eyes closed. Gun drawn, he scans the area for whatever did this, but sees nothing. "Ssh, ssh," his voice is far from calming but the intent is clear, however it does nothing to hinder Buster's small whimpers. The animal's small frame shakes in fear and Will's heart aches. He reaches with one hand, rifle clutched in the next, and feels for fatal wounds on the dog's frame. In response, the dog scrambles to his feet, but wobbles. Nothing fatal; but Buster can barely stand on his feet. Nothing broken, covered in blood and left to die. The match has been struck and Will sees fire as Buster growls, low and showing no indication that he is injured. Will admires the little thing's courage as he picks him up carefully but with haste. They have to get back inside.

There's a noise behind him but Will doesn't look back to check, making a run for his house. It seems much further than before and time feels stretched, as if this is just a nightmare and Will is about to wake up, drenched in sweat and shivering. It sounds like a blessing right now, he thinks, as the snow tries to sabotage his feet. A short glance behind him confirms it; a dark figure charging his way, snow at either side of it like a mirage. He has to get inside. He shoulders the door roughly and closes it behind him, greeted with crying dogs and a dark growl from Winston.

Buster has four shallow claw marks on his fur, crusted with blood but nonfatal. Will revels in the only good news he has as he places the small dog down with the others. He is being hunted and the only thought running through his mind is that it is Randall Tier, or the beast that Randall Tier has transformed into.

In a final attempt to shush his dogs, Will Graham turns off every light in his house. One last try to send the beast away, but he knows it is a long shot. Tier isn't stupid and with his new suit on he is a fast and dangerous predator. How did you find me? he thinks, backing up slowly toward the chest of drawers in his main room, Why me?

Worry decorating his now hard features, Will turns off the lamp to his right, engulfing his small home in darkness. He drowns out all sound from his ears and his dogs' warnings become a distant memory. There is silence, and for a moment it is almost peaceful. It stretches until it is deafening. Nothing moves; earth and time stand still.

There is a crash to his left; the beast jumps through his side window as if in slow motion. Glass shatters as his window breaks, and it moves in every direction acting like tiny daggers that plague the air. His dogs bark and whimper, but Will can't hear it. He can only hear the beast, but not Tier's beast.

His stag is next to him, but it does not move to his aid. Instead it observes, like it is testing Will. It is curious to see what he will do. He has seconds to react, but In that moment he is sure, with the beast of Randall Tier almost upon him, that this is Hannibal Lecter's doing.



"I'd say this makes us even."

Hannibal Lecter isn't a man who is easily startled, but Will has managed to do just that. Will's face looks bleak; grim, like he hates himself. Or maybe he hates the man in front of him. Hannibal knows that it is most likely both the former and the latter. Will stands like a mannequin of his own creation, legs wide apart and hands hanging at his sides. He feels numb until Hannibal graces the room with his presence. The body of Randall Tier lays on his dining room table, on his back with his head toward the door that Hannibal has entered from. Tier is nothing but the ghost of a man, stripped of his skeletal suit -- his alter ego -- and displayed like the centerpiece at a dinner party. Like a tribute to cannibalism. Hannibal's eyebrows raise slightly, and Will notices. Surprise.

"I send someone to kill you," Will says, eyes focused on Randall's corpse, mind and heart racing toward an invisible finish line, "you send someone to kill me." He looks up at Hannibal, eyes dangerous yet hungry. Hannibal appears to like what he sees as his own maroon eyes turn a shade darker and his pupils dilate. He closes the doors to the dining room behind him in a calm and patient manner, but there is a sense of arrogance to it that makes Will's blood pump faster. They look at one another from across the dining table, the promise of a new bond between them in the manifestation of Randall Tier's corpse, and Will feels something chilling in his stomach. It radiates through his entire body, freezing his mind, tingling at his toes and around his fingertips. It is pure and it is untamed power, and it is Hannibal's gift to him.

"Even-stevens," He says, and it feels comical but neither men laugh. And this does make them even; Hannibal had one-upped Will and Will hadn't seen it coming until the final moments. He almost lost his life tonight, and it is his own fault. He doesn't blame Hannibal for it; he blames Hannibal for him not feeling remorse about killing Tier.

Lecter nods sharply, small and out of character, seemingly pleased with what Will has said. He places his gloves upon the dining table, away from Tier's corpse, and advances toward Will. The younger man doesn't move. A cold hand graces Will's cheek and it is a familiar gesture from the other man. Will looks at him with ease; his heart begins to recover from its frozen state. Hannibal has a hold over him that he cannot admit, not to himself and certainly not to Jack. But he doesn't have to admit it to Hannibal because the older man can see right through him. The strong hand grips at the side of his face and pulls Will forward until his face is pressed against the shoulder of Hannibal's coat. The fabric feels rough to Will's cold cheek but he revels in the feeling. He wants to feel real; like he is really here and in the moment.

Without a word, Hannibal holds Will in place and exhales slowly, breath heating up the base of Will's neck. It feels... intimate. And killing deserves intimacy, and maybe that is what Hannibal Lecter understands. The need for intimacy in Will that he cannot ignore. It physically radiates from Will's form until he is resting a great deal of his body weight on the other man, who allows it. Hannibal's strong form does not seem affected by the change in pressure, and Will reminds himself silently that the older man is sure as hell capable in many shapes and forms. If Will can take advantage of his weakness, then he will catch him; ensnare him in he and Jack's trap. Finding that weakness just moved to the top of Will's priorities.

But not now. Not with this new found bond between them. It feels like more than friendship, but maybe it has been that way for a while. A new note has been played on the instrument between them; a new stanza has begun, and Will is eager to learn the melody. What Jack Crawford doesn't know won't kill him.

Chapter End Notes

The song is "Shatter Me" by Lindsey Stirling. It is meant to be said from Will's point of view.

Première Fois

Chapter Notes

Story title translation: Folie à Deux - Madness for two

Episode basis title translation: Naka Choko - a Japanese palate cleanser

Chapter title translation: Première Fois - First Time

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Chapter two - First Time *Chapitre deux - Première Fois*

This force is in love with you

It wants you safe, it wants you well

This force knows what you can do and what you can make with your tattered shell

A distant circle in the mind of Will Graham plays a sombre tone. It is both parts antagonizing and endearing; it is a delicate balance of notes and harmonies which Will loses himself to. Hannibal has proved to be more than capable of learning music; particularly the melody that plays between he and Will. He has mastered the instrument between them and perfected it; it now plays his own song. At least, that is what he believes. And that is what Will wants him to believe. The further Will tumbles into the darkness that Hannibal offers, the deeper and stronger he and Hannibal's bond becomes. Will's willingness to lose himself in the limbo is a small cause of concern for him, but right now, under the supervision of Lecter, it isn't his top priority.

He can feel the cool and calming breath of a dark creature behind him, towering over him and exhaling down his neck. It feels like possession, and he knows it may as well be. The stag is silent as it simply observes him, nothing but its breath echoing throughout the large room. The walls are cold to the touch, Will's fingertips confirm, as he grazes them over them as he walks. A reminder of reality; or a warped version of reality. His reality isn't exactly the one he had previously conceived. Not with blood on his hands and not with Hannibal Lecter by his side, the second half of their game finally initiated. This is his design, but it is a design in the making, partly previously constructed by Will himself.

The museum is empty; as it should be. Closing time hours in the past, Will somehow expects Randall Tier to round a corner and devour him. Dressed in a white lab coat, Will expects Tier to lunge at him, aiming for the throat. He envisions it perfectly and watches Tier tear him to pieces from the sidelines. But he never does, and it leaves Will with an eerie sense of

disappointment. The chance to beat the beast himself once more. To feel bones crack against his knuckles; to watch them fragmentize beneath his palms. To consume the power that Hannibal had so willingly laid in front of him and allow it to metamorphose him into a killer. It is maddening. Hannibal's hand graces the small curve of Will's back and it brings the younger man back to the reality he has created for himself. It was his idea to come here; to come to the museum and pay his final respects to Randall Tier. To provide him with what he could not have in life, but in death.

Hannibal is remarkably quiet for the evening; the two men barely speaking a couple words to one another in the excruciating car journey there, and now, in the midst of the intense stares of extinct skeletal structures, they are silent. And Will is thankful for it. Hannibal's gentle palm guides him away from the wall previously assigned as his anchor; that responsibility now transferred to Hannibal. It is entirely his idea, and he cannot blame the any other psychopath but himself for his actions. They come to a pause in front of a set of cave bear bones, meticulously assembled by Tier's own hands. His final creation. Hannibal leans close to Will's ear and whispers to him. A tribute.



“Polite society normally places such a taboo on taking life,” Will says, with a scoff to follow, from where he sits in Hannibal's dining room. As it so happened, Will had managed to cut into his knuckles terribly when murdering Randall Tier. Jack would be sure to notice that his wounds were more than mere self defense, and then some. Hannibal had sat Will down and disappeared into the other room, before emerging with a small, transparent basin filled with lukewarm water.

“Without death,” Hannibal starts as he places the basin down onto the dining table and takes a seat. He has discarded his suit coat somewhere in the kitchen, it seems, “we'd be at a loss.”

Will looks at him helplessly, eyes betraying him. He has succumbed to the darkness that Hannibal has created and it hasn't unnerved him. It has... molded him, sculpted him into something new. And something deadly.

“It's the prospect of death that drives us to greatness,” Hannibal continues, taking Will's hand delicately and submerging it into the basin, wrist deep in water, “Did you kill him with your hands?”

Will refuses to look at Hannibal, and settles for looking down at his hand. He watches as the basin fills with his own blood; the water mingles with it like smoke. Like a tornado; the destruction and devastation in a simple act of God. He had killed Randall Tier, but had it been under Hannibal's influence or his own? The older man would have been better suited asking if Will had envisioned Tier as Hannibal himself; which would be true.

“It was,” Will begins, voice quiet and rough as he studies Hannibal's careful action of dabbing his knuckles with cotton wool, “intimate.”

Hannibal doesn't falter but he does look at Will for a small moment and Will feels like he has laid his soul bare. "It deserves intimacy. You were Randall Tiers final enemy."

Will briefly wonders if Hannibal will be his final enemy. A worthy opponent, and someone just as cunning and capable as Will himself, if not exceeding Will's own abilities. But that is yet to be tested, he reminds himself. He shrinks in on himself; he is safe inside. He is safe in his own mind, or at least half of it. The half that isn't yet plagued with a darkness threatening to consume him; it pushes and it prods and it swims inside his mind like a black smoke, infecting his frontal lobe like an untameable force. Will has felt himself lose touch with his morality and his reasoning; he has found a way to work around his previous beliefs until now they cease to exist. Killing comes as a second nature; the beast inside of him which lay dormant from the beginning of his life has begun to stir. Will feels like he has only just started to feel alive.

This is Hannibal's doing; this is Hannibal's design. And for once, Will isn't sure if he can tame the stag in his brain.

"Don't go inside, Will."

The stag whinnies for his attention, and he returns from his reverie with a small exhale. Hannibal isn't looking at him; he doesn't need to be. The hand soaked in water feels better than the other; cleansed and cared for in a way that makes Will's ears burn.

"You'll want to retreat. You'll want it, as the glint of the rail tempts us when we hear the approaching train." The older man continues, speaking significantly and halting his movements to look up at Will and ensure his attention. Will can envision them, side by side, next to a rail in the pitch black of night. The train is upcoming to their left, headlights illuminating them, and it is harsh and cruel. It has no intention of stopping. How easily Will could end Hannibal's life; how abruptly he could terminate their friendship and bond with a simple, perfectly timed, push. A small nudge and Hannibal would be reduced to nothing.

But when the time comes, he does nothing. The train passes, air colliding with them and rustling their clothes as the rail is occupied. In the midst of the madness, Hannibal's eyes are on Will; there is pride in his eyes, and something hidden behind a veil of maroon. Will aches to find out what.

"Stay with me," Hannibal says with purpose, an obvious hidden meaning behind his words that Will picks up on. And the man before him need not worry; Will can't retreat, not now. Not now that he is in too deep. He has to catch Hannibal before he loses himself.

Eyes closing, Will's response is almost instantaneous, "Where else would I go?"

Hannibal slowly takes Will's hand out of the water, his body automatically missing the calming heat. Will opens his eyes when he feels a soft fabric touch him; Lecter is bandaging him up. It is thoughtful, Will thinks, but necessary.

"You have everywhere to go."

Hannibal's statement hangs in the air and it makes Will's mouth water. You have everywhere to go and, yet, here you are. And the older man is right; Will has chosen to be with him rather than be alone. Rather than telling Jack what happened. Hannibal holds Will's hand delicately, wrapping the bandage around his knuckles with surgical precision. He has done this before, of course he has.

"You should be quite pleased," Hannibal adds, "I am."

"Of course you are." Will retorts. Of course he is pleased; his puppet has killed just like intended. A stab of spite hits Will in the side and he flinches away from Hannibal, but apparently the other man isn't going to have that. He holds onto Will's hand with a strong grip, still careful of the wounds decorating the knuckles.

"Let me," Hannibal says, returning his attention to Will's other hand after the bandage is secured. Will turns slightly in his seat to give Hannibal the opposite hand. This is beyond crazy; the Chesapeake Ripper is bandaging his hand in the middle of his dining room. They sit at the table where Randall Tier's dead body laid hours before. They are waiting for the call they will both get; Jack Crawford will find Tier's corpse mutilated in tribute and will figure it out. Time is of the essence.

Beyond them, the fireplace crackles softly, almost out. Will has the urge to add some fuel but this isn't his home; this isn't his life. He has to remind himself that he does not fit into this life no matter how right it might feel. Feelings are only temporary in the mind of Will Graham. But, no; he has to keep Lecter interested. He cannot close in on himself.

"Fire's almost out," He notes, breaking the silence that they had fallen into. Hannibal glances at the fireplace and offers a small hum in response.

"Are you cold?"

Will simply shakes his head and watches Hannibal's careful hands. They treat his wounds with more care than Will thought the man was capable of. He can only slightly see part of his hand through the murky water; it is tainted with he and Tier's blood, mixing together almost poetically. Regardless of Will's response, Hannibal simply releases his hand and dries his own off with a small cloth he had brought into the room.

"I had not anticipated needing more fuel tonight than I usually do," Hannibal explains as he stands gracefully and makes his way to the fireplace to add some more flames. Will watches him with distant eyes, noting the colours change in the other's face as the fire comes back to life with ease. Hannibal pokes at the logs with a fire iron and lets the crackling noises fill the room.

Will's face remains stoic, the small furrow in his brow the only indication of an emotion, "You weren't expecting me?"

"No," Hannibal admits, a small smile on his lips as he straightens his back and looks at Will, "I wasn't entirely certain what would happen."

Will takes his time digesting that. Perhaps Hannibal really was telling the truth by admitting he could never predict Will. The thought made him feel a lot better; maybe then if Hannibal had his suspicions then he would find it a lot harder to remain on the same train of thought. After all, if Will was entirely unpredictable to Hannibal then his betrayal must have already crossed the other man's mind at some point. Hannibal had to consider every possible point of view.

"Though I'm not complaining," Hannibal continues, pushing his left sleeve back above his elbow from where it had drifted down his forearm whilst poking the fire. He sits back down next to Will and takes the other man's hand back out of the basin, preparing for bandaging, "Your actions exceeded my expectations."

Will attempts not to scoff, but his resistance proves futile when his throat betrays him and he does. Hannibal looks at him with scrutiny afterwards. Your actions have sure exceeded Jack's expectations, too, his mind retorts. And it is true. Jack Crawford could have no idea what he and Hannibal are up to. Will is going to be well incriminated enough by now, only adding Randall Tier to the pot made things a lot more complicated. He can argue it was self-defence, but it would be a lie. It was murder; plain and simple.

"Most of what we do, most of what we believe," Hannibal says, as if reading Will's thoughts, "is motivated by death."

"Most of what I do," Will says, voice shaking with restraint, "most of what I think, what I believe, is motivated by you."

Hannibal goes quiet at this, and for a moment Will thinks he may have prevailed in the verbal spar between them. But only in that moment, for Hannibal has another idea. He presses his thumb on top of Will's knuckles on the hand he is tending to and applies a small pressure. It hurts. It hurts like hell. Will grunts in response; now Hannibal has his attention.

"Are my sentiments truly that important to you, Will?" Hannibal asks, voice hard and low. The thumb on Will's knuckles twists unsparing and Will grits his teeth.

"That's what you want, is it not?"

Hannibal's lips form a straight line; he clearly does not appreciate Will's conjecture. The crackle of fire to his right fuels the blaze inside his chest as the older man looks at Will's cold eyes. He is hiding something; something Hannibal cannot figure out, "I want nothing more than to have a positive influence on you."

Will moves his free, now bandaged hand, over Hannibal's and grips at the offending thumb in threat. Hannibal's response is to increase the pressure, unsympathetically. Will's lips part in a sharp inhale, pain radiating through his hand and along his wrist. Hannibal's eyes are intense; hungry. Like he is anticipating something from Will, but he can't figure out what. Will grips the back of Hannibal's palm, eyes hard.

"You have what you want," Will says, momentarily ignoring the stag emerging from behind Hannibal. It huffs in anger, visibly panting, lungs and chest expanding in short bursts, "Don't salt the wound."

There is a short moment of intimacy, one that leaves Will feeling breathless. Hannibal looks at him attentively before loosening his painful grip on the wound, but keeps his hand on Will's skin. It is only for a terse moment, but it feels like a lifetime; their hands together, sharing warmth and touching skin. Will is close enough to notice small flecks of yellow in the other man's eyes, similar to caramel. It provides Hannibal with a subtle sense of vulnerability which Will didn't know the other man was capable of. Hannibal's lips part as he exhales briefly, staring at Will who unconsciously licks his lips. The older man has never seemed so soft and, dare he say, un-intimidating, Will thinks. But the moment is over when Hannibal withdraws and Will is left feeling cold.

Without a word, Hannibal returns to bandaging Will's hand like nothing has happened. Will tries not to think about how Hannibal makes him feel, but it is inevitable. Whenever Hannibal touches him, a quiet rage radiates through his body and repels him. But there's also a small part of him that yearns for the contact; part of him that enjoys the raw fury and emotion the other man brings out in him. This is something no one but Will can know; Jack Crawford certainly cannot know. The room they are in feels empty. But it feels crowded, too. He can't decide how to feel. Hannibal is caring for his hand, lost in thought, and Will is on the verge of another mental breakdown. Or perhaps a mental epiphany. With every minute he spends with the cannibal next to him, he discovers new things about himself; not necessarily things he actually wants to know. But it is foolish to run from oneself, and Will has been running from the truth his entire life. Hannibal brought it to the surface for only Will to see. And what he sees scares him.

"I've never felt as alive as I did when I was killing Randall Tier," the words are out of his mouth before he allows himself to register that he has spoken. Hannibal has just finished tying a tight knot around Will's knuckles when he looks up at the other man, intrigued.

"Then you were correct," Hannibal says, "You owed Randall Tier a debt. And you have repaid that debt remarkably."

Will offers a small, torn smile to that and that is all he can muster. He can wait a few hours to hear from Jack. "The museum opens at nine tomorrow."

Hannibal returns the smile with ease, but it doesn't touch his eyes, "Then that leaves plenty of time to rest until the call."

Will nods slowly, rising to his feet and rubbing at his knuckles. The bandages are soft and still hold remnants of the warmth from Hannibal's hands. It makes Will feel sick to his stomach. The room feels brighter than before, and Will feels himself stumble when he stands. A strong arm slides around his back and steadies him, and Will is thankful for it. An irrational moment of worry washes over him in fear that Hannibal is going to embrace him, but he doesn't, and instead Will is left with a twinge of disappointment. Blood rushes to his head and blurs his vision; he feels like he is swimming. The arm around him tightens.

"Orthostatic hypo-tension is quite common, Will," Hannibal says, voice miles away, "You rose to your feet too quickly. Here," the older man shifts his weight and allows Will to lean against him, "lean on me."

A head rush. Plain and simple; Will could curse at Hannibal's arrogant need to overcomplicate and lather everything in metaphors and medical terms. Sometimes he wonders if he sounds like that to others, too. "Colloquially known as getting dizzy."

Hannibal smiles at Will's annoyance but doesn't respond. Will regains his posture rather quickly after that and clears his throat, rubbing at his eyes, suddenly more tired than before. He is acutely aware that he hasn't eaten anything today, but he doesn't mention it. No doubt Hannibal would feel an obligation to serve him an elegant dinner with a side of long pig; but tonight, he has to politely refuse. Will's vision fades back into focus and his eyes are met with a pair of deep maroon ones, sparkling in the light projecting from the fireplace. It heats up the room significantly; at least, it heats up Will a substantial amount. Hannibal's proximity is extremely unnerving and disorienting, but Will can't bring himself to pull away; instead he simply stares at the other man without a word.

"I must insist that you sleep here tonight," Hannibal all but whispers, looking at Will gently and with purpose. Of course Hannibal would ask him to stay the night, Will thinks. Of course he would; and Will would oblige because it is polite and it is in the early hours of the morning. A quick glance toward the glass doors at the opposite end of the room confirm that it is also snowing. Will curses himself for walking himself into this situation. "And when Jack Crawford calls tomorrow, we will be prepared. Together."

"Together?" The world rolls off Will's tongue and hangs in the air like some sort of secret has just been shared between them. Will, for the life of him, cannot read Hannibal's face for an answer other than what rolls off of the other man's tongue.

"Yes," Hannibal says with a smile. This time it reaches his eyes.

As the two men stand, inches apart with Hannibal's strong arm around Will's waist, the world outside keeps moving. Time and space do not alter themselves; do not mould themselves around Hannibal and Will; do not affect the silence stretching between their exchange. Yet, Will feels like he and Hannibal are separated from the world. They are too tangled in the bond they share to become intertwined with the world outside; but their bond feels as delicate as a bubble, one mistake and it will burst. Will must continue to tread carefully; he must continue to tiptoe around Hannibal and dance the dance they have created together. And Hannibal can never learn of his betrayal. And Will can remain loyal until the end. They make their own world when they are together, and that is where Will Graham is safe. And it is where he can be himself.

None the less, Will pulls away from Hannibal and it is more difficult to do than he imagined. Hannibal straightens himself and tilts his head, "The guest room is made up for you to sleep in," he says, then notices Will's mouth open in retort, but silences him, "You will be the first to sleep there for quite some time."

Will briefly wonders if Alana has slept in it; but of course not. She would only sleep next to Hannibal. He feels his face pale; the idea of the two of them together is distressing. One, for the safety of Alana - she doesn't know she's sleeping with an intelligent psychopath. Or, rather, she refuses to believe it. Will has informed her on many occasions, but that is in the past. Second, Will can't wrap his head around the fact that Hannibal has room in his life for Alana when Will is there. A selfish thought, but all that he could read of the other man is that

there was nothing much more important in his life than Will. It is... jealousy in its raw form. And it makes Will hate himself.

He follows Lecter out of the room and up the staircase, presumably to his room for the evening. Lecter's home is decorated much like Will had expected; elegance and pride radiate from the walls and it makes Will feel very out of place. The wall lining the staircase to his left is decorated with paintings, some of which Will can recognize and some he can't; the ones he can make him wonder just how wealthy Hannibal is. Art is expensive, and especially art of Hannibal Lecter's taste. Perhaps Hannibal creates his own art in the theme of corpses because buying the paintings he desires would lead to bankrupt. Will smiles to himself; if only it were that simple. Hannibal is not petty. Greedy, maybe, but not when it comes to art. Greedy when it comes to Will, definitely.

The room Hannibal leads Will into is dimly lit when they enter, and Will can only see a small portion of the room which is illuminated by the moon coming through the window pane. Hannibal disappears into the darkness, and Will has the instinct to follow him, but he doesn't. A lamp flickers on and the room lights up, and Will can't decide if he preferred when he could not see it. It is divinely decorated; walls crimson red and dark wooden flooring. The bed has a copious number of decorative pillows on it, and it makes Will grimace uncomfortably. Too excessive. This room feels wrong; it feels lonely. No one sleeping in it and no one to grace it with their presence in such a long time leaves it feeling cold and rejected. A little like Will before he had met Hannibal; maybe he had intended to give Will this room all along.

"My bedroom is the second door from the stairs," Hannibal mentions, voice dripping in hospitality, "The upstairs bathroom is at the end of the hall. Do you require sleepwear? I have spares, though our sizes vary."

"No," Will says instantly; he isn't sure he can take smelling like a mixture of expensive cologne and Hannibal Lecter the entire night, "My under-shirt is fine."

The other man stares at him for a short moment before nodding and glancing toward the small clock on the bedside table. Will's eyes follow his; it is two thirty-seven am. Jack will presumably call around noon and that gives him plenty of time to rest to prepare for the grilling he will most definitely receive from the other man. Will can envision Jack's strong voice vibrating in his ear drums; and he will sit and he will listen, because Jack is right. Will killed Randall in cold blood, and he will claim self-defense and Jack will fruitlessly try to prove it. His freedom is a ticking time bomb, a lot like Lecter's. Both of their days are numbered.

"Lost in thought?" Hannibal asks, brow risen in curiosity. He is standing further away from Will now, hand straightening a photograph on top of a chest of drawers. Will feels like he is breathing down his neck despite his eyes telling him the other man is meters away.

Will falters, eyes moving from Hannibal's hand to the eyes in front of him, "Not lost."

The look Hannibal gives him is unreadable, and yet so intriguing that it keeps Will on his toes. The Doctor has a remarkable ability to make Will feel inadequate -- in every definition of the word -- with a single glance and in a single exhale of breath.

“If not lost,” Hannibal says, “where do your thoughts lead you?”

Will doesn't know how to respond. Or, he does, but he isn't sure he can admit that right now. His mind seems to betray him only when in the presence of Hannibal Lecter; whether that is an act purposely implemented by the doctor himself, his entire demeanor constructed to manipulate his environment and those around him, or an act of Will's subconscious, he isn't sure. He isn't sure he wants to learn the real answer, either. His feet feel cold on the wooden floor. He does not remember removing his shoes; it feels like a rude gesture in Lecter's home, but the other man hadn't mentioned it. This place... it feels like home. And it makes Will feel sick. This house is the pride and joy of a monster; a remarkably intelligent and alluring monster at that. It should not feel like home and he should not feel like he belongs here. But he does, and Hannibal does a grand job of ensuring it stays that way. Dripping in hospitality, Hannibal radiates pride when he looks at Will. It is easy to become lost in congratulation.

“Home,” Will says.

Hannibal's hesitation is miss-able, but not by Will. “And where is that?”

The fact that the other man has the audacity to ask where Will considers home indicates that he knows fine well what Will means. He is asking for the simple pleasure and torment it will cause. Will could strangle the man where he stands; end it with his bare hands and flee. Be done with this life and the next; be done with Jack Crawford and the FBI. And be done with Hannibal Lecter's torment. But he cannot do it. He cannot rid himself of the very torment his body craves and his mind desires. No one can know; no one can know but Hannibal. Jack Crawford can certainly not become aware of Hannibal's hold on Will; he cannot learn how tightly Will is caught in the cannibal's web.

“I'm not sure I know the answer to that anymore.” Will says and avoids the question.

But his response is enough for Hannibal who smiles a little and moves toward the door. His impending departure is a blessing for Will. “If you find yourself unable to sleep, do not hesitate to find me. Goodnight, Will.”

Will doesn't say anything as Hannibal closes the door gently behind him and the weight is then lifted from the younger man's shoulders. He slumps and holds onto the bed post for support; both emotional and physical. He is exhausted from both the verbal and mental spars between himself and Hannibal. It has been a long night, destined to lead onto an even longer day ahead. The creaking of floorboards as Hannibal retreats to his own bedroom does nothing to ease the racing in Will's mind -- he cannot forget where he is, or whose company he is in or whose hospitality he is willingly accepting. He can feel the tension in his shoulders whilst removing his shirt and setting aside almost half a dozen decorative pillows so he can rest. The stag is nowhere to be seen nor heard; no hooves on the ground to trot through Will's mind and keep him awake at night, and no distant breath from lungs that are not his own.

Will doesn't remember falling asleep.



A loud buzz. Stretching tense muscles and aching all over. Another buzz, this time continuous. A reaching hand; five missed calls. That is when Will remembers that he is not in Wolftrap. And there are no coated companions by his side because he is in Hannibal Lecter's home. It is six thirty-five am, you're in Baltimore, Maryland. Your name is Will Graham.

A pair of slacks and a dress shirt later, and Will has already heard an earful from Jack Crawford. Where is he? What has he done? Will would ask himself the same questions, but he can't. He will continue avoiding it until he can no longer. There is a quiet, cautious knock on his bedroom door. Or rather, Hannibal Lecter's guest room door. Will breathes deeply, hating himself for thinking of this place like home. Two killers under one roof; it seems crazy, it feels crazy. The idea is ludicrous and abnormal, but Will doesn't think normality is really a term he can apply to anything in his life anymore. Not since he met Hannibal.

"Will?" There is a quiet voice from behind the door which unmistakably belongs to Hannibal, sounding fully awake and aware. Will briefly wonders if the man has slept, and if he hasn't, then what he had been occupying himself with during the night. A book or composing music, no doubt.

Will says nothing as he makes his way to the door and opens it, greeted by the sight of Hannibal completely dressed in a fine suit, without the trace of fatigue on his face. Will, on the other hand, looks like the polar opposite of the older man before him. It is slightly... intimidating. Of all things to be intimidated at from Dr. Lecter. Absent-mindedly, Will flattens his shirt with his free hand, the other gripping the door knob.

"Ah. You're awake," Hannibal says, not looking surprised in the slightest, "Jack Crawford has called me a total of four times in the past hour alone."

"You're not the only one he has been harassing." Will responds, a small sigh in his words. He moves past the other man swiftly and completely absent of eye contact, and makes his way down the hall toward the stairs. Perhaps he is being rude, or perhaps he is being sensible. If it is possible to scold rudeness toward a serial killer, Will will hear about it later from the killer himself, but for now he has to deal with Jack Crawford's short temper.



It sure as hell doesn't feel like the same museum anymore, Jack thinks, as he descends the tinted marble staircase. He removes his hat mid-step, having worn it to shield his head from the harsh winter wind outside, but now a cold layer of sweat is heavy on his forehead. Down the staircase, visible from the second floor balcony, is Randall Tier. Or pieces of him; a speck of the man Jack had met just days prior. Now face to face, Jack stares into Randall Tier's distant eyes with a grimace, all measures of betrayal and contrition visible in his expression. The moonlight shines in through the tall windows beyond him and does an adequate job of illuminating Tier's mutilated corpse in an artistic light. A true sculpture of criminality; nothing but a shell of a man remaining before him, having had the insides torn from his corpse. Probably shrink wrapped and refrigerated for dinner, Jack thinks with a harsh scoff. Nothing but a few days and those internal organs will be used in some obnoxious plate,

presumably andouille for appetizers, haggis for main course, washed down with a cold sense of dread and regret, or at least Jack hopes so. No human being could be able to put another on display as Randall Tier is presented. Humiliated in the middle of a public space, his place of work. Hannibal Lecter has a lot to answer for.

Tier's facial tissue has been severed beneath the upper teeth, the incision continuing delicately along the jaw towards the earlobe. Blood tints the skin around the incision and continues along Tier's hairline; he has taken a beating, presumably before the time of death. Tier's facial tissue has been placed upon a saber toothed skeletal structure, the teeth replacing where the lower teeth would be positioned, respectively. Jack fights back a wince, noting that the remainder of Tier's shed skin has been applied onto the remaining skeletal structure of the saber-toothed cave bear; one which Jack cannot identify and right now, it doesn't really matter. What matters is what the hell happened here. In his years of service, Crawford has never seen anything quite like it. A man put on display in such a way; some kind of humiliation to dishonor him even after death?

"Where the hell is Will Graham?" Jack shouts, startling a few of his team members in doing so. Scrambling to answer, the team test Jack's patience, "Someone get him down here right now!"



"The killer chose not to dispose of the body," Jack says, voice intense and strong, and it hits Will right in the gut, "but to display it."

"A jarring reminder of the informality of death." Hannibal says significantly, from where he stands on the opposite side of Randall Tier's tribute from Jack, admiring Will's handiwork. Jack has the face of a man who does not have time for this, and Hannibal seems to pick up on that, choosing then to remain silent.

"Randall Tier was denied the respectful end that he himself denied to others." Jack responds, attempting to get a response out of Hannibal. What kind of response, he isn't sure, but any excuse to choke the life out of the psychiatrist before him would be enough.

Will has been circling the body silently, mind lost in thought. Lost indefinitely in the what ifs and could have beens; he cannot wrap his intelligent mind around the idea that this is his doing. This is his masterpiece, his work of art. A work of art on display for all of Baltimore to observe. This is his design, and his alone; this time Hannibal Lecter has nothing to do with what Will has done. Albeit influence from Hannibal, the method of applying Tier's severed skin to a skeletal structure of his choosing before livor mortis set in was entirely Will Graham's idea and doing; and Will Graham's alone. A short, yet somehow debilitating, glance in Hannibal's direction confirms that he has registered Will's anxiety on the subject.

"This is a humiliation," Hannibal says, and it ignites something in Will that he cannot ignore. A humiliation is far from what this is and Hannibal knows it; getting a rise from him is all the

Doctor is trying to do. And it is working, and it makes Will hate himself just a bit more. “A final indignity.”

“He isn’t mocking him,” Will is hasty with his retort on Hannibal’s words, “This isn’t disdain.”

Both Jack and Hannibal both turn to Will, the mood of the room altered to fit Will’s presence. It feels like listening to Hannibal speak, Jack notes, narrowing his eyes as the other man whom he has failed to recognize as Will Graham. The change in Will had not been subtle, of course; it had been instantaneous and it had advanced so quickly and cleverly that Jack had not had the chance to pull the plug. And Will was in too deep now, that much he knew himself. He is intelligent enough to know when he is being kept in the dark, and when he is being withheld information. Jack has to find some incriminating evidence on Lecter soon or he is in serious danger of losing Will; losing him to a sociopath serial killer.

Will exhales sharply, ignoring the self-deprecating thoughts plaguing his mind and seeping into his psyche. His coat is high on his neck but he does not retreat into it, no longer using it to hide from the likes of Jack Crawford. No; he has to face what he has done, he has to face his own creation. Look Randall Tier in the eye and grant him his final wish; to become the beast he was born to be.

“He’s,” Will pauses, short on words, making a short mental note to keep his hands tucked inside his coat pockets. Revealing his wounds to Jack right now would not be an intelligent thing to do, he thinks. Jack studies Will with such an intensity that Will has to refuse eye contact. “He’s commemorating him.”

“This killer has no fear for the consequences of what he’s done.” Hannibal is the first to respond, and Will is grateful for it, giving his full attention to the other man as they continue their exchange.

“No guilt.” Will confirms quietly, face stoic and fists clenched inside his pockets. Hannibal watches him with a slight sense of pride evident in his eyes, miss-able by most but not by Will. Jack, on the other hand, does not share the cannibal’s optimism. Crawford’s eyes are cold and close to dead; as threatening as the headlights of an oncoming car. Jack is a charging bull, close on Will’s heels and heaving in every breath with a grunt. Will can feel the man’s eyes on him, but it isn’t as important as the remnant of life in front of him. He thinks he can hear Randall Tier’s voice; a soft whisper ghosting the shell of his ear, seeping through the eardrum and into the back of Will’s mind. He takes a cautious step forwards, then closes his eyes, allowing Tier’s voice to consume him. Everything goes dark for a small moment, before Will reopens his eyes and the museum is now empty. No one but he and Tier decorate the room, standing inches apart, Tier still adding ornament to the cave bears skeletal structure. A steady heartbeat reaches Will’s ears and the corners of his lips twitch; he takes comfort in this solitude.

“Hello again,” Will says, as casual as a typical conversation. Randall’s eyes snap to attention, life suddenly evident in them. He looks at Will with intent, despite exhibiting zero signs of advancing. Will is certain the structure would collapse on itself if Tier attempted to move.

Come closer, Tier says, though his mouth remains stationary, and Will realizes the voice is simply in his head. Regardless, Will takes another cautious step towards the beast. Behind him, his own beast -- the stag, a towering creature whose coat is as black as night -- whinnies in protest. It does not feel confident that Randall Tier will be anything but hostile, *I want to see you*.

Will circles Tier's decaying form, admiring his own handiwork, the stag falling behind him with a heavy breath. Remnants of torn ligaments and skin are draped over thigh bones and calves; the left over skin dangling from the skeletal structure does not make Will retch like he assumed it would. It appears he is cut out for this kind of thing, after all. First with Garrett Jacob Hobbs, now with Randall Tier; a killer at heart, he will deny the implications until the end. Until he can no longer run from himself, and ensnare Hannibal in he and Jack's trap simultaneously. A first, and debatably final, masterpiece; giving Randall what he truly wanted; to become a beast. He only had to pay for it with his demise, a fate he seemed willing to comply with as Will beat him to death. His right hand begins to throb painfully in remembrance and Will has to unclench his fist from inside his pocket.

Can you see you? Tier's voice seeps through his mind like poison.

Will looks up, startled. He pauses, now standing at the back side of Tier's form, and lets out a small but shaky breath. "Clearer and clearer."

And it is true, Will can now finally begin to understand why he is the way he is. Why his debilitating condition held him back in life, and why now, under the tentative watch of Hannibal Lecter, that Will is unlocking his full potential. The potential to metamorphose into an intelligent sociopath. He is certain that Jack will not note these new developments as potentials, but rather unpromising predictions of the future. And he will also be correct in thinking so.

"You forced me to kill you," Will accuses, voice hard and steady. Tier seems closer now, as Will feels a ghostly presence behind him. It makes him feel warmth; a delicate sense of intimacy fills his mind with the stag accompanying him. Breath hot on his neck, Will thinks of Hannibal, and how he is able to make him feel the same way the stag does.

I didn't force you to enjoy it, Tier responds in the same tone as before. As he speaks, Will notes a small movement in his peripheral, and when he glances towards it his eyes confirm that Randall Tier is standing before him, in the nude and with the addition of a saber-toothed jaw. *You made me a monument*.

"You're welcome," Will replies, taking small steps towards Tier's death-life stance. Behind him, he can feel the warm and damp breath of the stag on his neck, making the hair on his arms raise.

The monument is not to me, Tier corrects, *It's to you*.

Will turns his body to face Tier, now meters away, but his face shows small signs of confusion. "I gave you what you want. This is who you are." He says, saving his own skin, "What you feel finally matches the reality of what I see."

Tier's hand is suddenly on his shoulder, and the other man is behind him, replacing the stag. The hand applies an even, steady pressure to Will's collarbone but it does nothing to ease his racing mind. *This is my becoming. And it's yours.*

Will's head shakes from side to side robotically on its own accord, but the darker half of Will's mind listens to Tier. Hears him; discerns the ghostly echoes implemented into Will's psyche. Tier is correct, of course. It truly is his becoming; a birth, and a death. The birth of a unique sociopath murderer, and the death of Will Graham. At least, the old Will Graham. The Will Graham who allowed himself to be denied from the forensics department; allowed himself to be controlled by his conditions and allow them to hinder him from advancement. The Will Graham who took Jack Crawford's orders without a second opinion.

Will cannot not decide which version of himself he would rather be.

"This is my design," Will says; a confession of guilt. And a confirmation of responsibility to the murder and display of Randall Tier.

There is a pause, then in the time it took Will to blink the world had returned to its regular state. Jack Crawford is standing behind him, looking over his right shoulder. Hannibal stands in a similar stance on Will's other side, standing closer to him than Jack. Will takes comfort in the other man's proximity, toiling with himself to not ache for the intimacy that Hannibal's body radiates.

"He knew his killer. There's a," he hears himself say, then pauses to collect himself, "familiarity here. Someone who met him, understood him. Someone like him. Different pathology; same instinct."

Behind Will, Hannibal averted Jack's gaze and focused on the corpse of Randall Tier. Will's words were intended for Hannibal to understand and interpret that their relationship was terribly similar to Tier and his killer's.

"The killer empathised with him?" Jack Crawford asks, a clear and calculated accusation aimed at Will that is no longer hidden in his voice. He takes a step forward and angles himself so that his body is now facing Will. Hannibal remains motionless, not even observing the heated exchange.

"Don't mistake understanding for empathy, Jack." Will retorts, saving his skin, "No, if there's anything, it's... It's envy."

"Envy?" Jack echoes.

"Randall Tier came into his own much easier than whoever killed him." Will says, voice quiet and tame. He isn't aware of how much he has begun to shrink in on himself until Hannibal speaks, seeming to sense Will's anxiety.

"This was a fledgling killer. He's never killed before," Hannibal pauses, eyes burning a hole into the back of Will's skull. Will feels his thoughts becoming invaded. "Not like this."

“Not like this,” Will repeats, acutely aware of the way Jack observes he and Hannibal's exchange, “This is the nightmare that followed him out of his dreams.”

Will's words create a tense atmosphere for the rest of the day; Will does not leave the museum with Jack Crawford. Not that he is afraid to, but hesitant and determined to prolong the peace before Crawford can hand Will's ass to him. It is not an appealing predicament that Will wants to find himself in. Hannibal accompanies him as they descend the stairs of the museum entrance, and Will is grateful for the company of someone on his wavelength; someone of the same caliber in intelligence. Not that Jack Crawford was not intelligent, he just... lacked the companionship that Hannibal Lecter offered and provided him with. A feeling of intimacy crept over him and made him hate himself.

“Allow me to drive you home,” Hannibal offers, extracting Will from his own mind, startling him. A soft part of Will's mind clutches to the idea of retiring to his home in Wolftap with his dogs and sleeping for an eternity, but alas, such things can only be part of a daydream and not reality. Perhaps he could create his own mind palace filled with his dogs; a true haven for himself.

“I have an interview scheduled with Freddie Lounds,” Will says.

Hannibal's eyes narrow slightly, but it only lasts a moment before his expression returns to neutral. But Will picked up on it, and Hannibal is sure to know that. The wind is cold against Will's cheeks and he pulls his scarf further up his face to shield himself against the harsh winter wind. Hannibal, on the other hand, seemingly un-phased by the weather, opens the passenger side door of his sedan and gestures for Will to get inside.

Will raises a brow momentarily but takes Hannibal's offer of a ride and enters the car, having the door closed behind him in a friendly gesture. Hannibal sure wasn't without his charm, that much Will could be sure. Jack Crawford's stare had left Will with an uncomfortable kneading in his stomach; somewhere in the mixture of dread and resentment. Will resented Jack for getting him into this mess in the first place; he had not wanted to be pushed and prodded into becoming FBI. But he could not entirely fault Crawford for the mess Will found himself in; after all, it was his idea to ensnare Hannibal in their web of lies. Will had to remind himself of that fact.

“You seem troubled, Will.”

Hannibal's voice made Will close his eyes after putting on his seat belt, allowing the warm air from the AC to mingle with his breath and heat his body. He could feel Hannibal's eyes on him, and decided to open his own, averting his gaze toward the window and looking back up at the museum where Jack Crawford and his team remained to examine the crime scene. Hannibal had started the engine yet the car remained stationary; something about his gesture gave Will the impression that he would not begin driving until Will answered him.

“Not troubled,” Will offered, voice low, “I am resigning myself.”

And it is true; he resigned himself to his fate and accepted that he was a murderer whilst inside the museum. Now he just had to figure out how long he had known he was this way; and how long he had denied himself such a release.

Hannibal's response was not instantaneous. "Your words convey a hint of regret."

Will turns his head to look at Hannibal, who in turn has averted his gaze in favor of checking his side view mirror, preparing to pull the car out of the parking space. Will is surprised by Hannibal's response, and the vulnerability entangled in his words.

"Randall Tier got what he wanted." Will says, trying to get Hannibal's attention as the car begins to move and the older man begins driving. No, Will did not regret killing Randall Tier; he realizes it as soon as Hannibal brings his intentions into question. "I have nothing to regret."

"What about you, Will?" Hannibal asks, sparing a glance at the younger man, hands firmly gripping the steering wheel, "Did you get what you wanted?"

Will observes Hannibal in thought, the AC beginning to heat up the car and also fuel the fire inside Will's gut. Or maybe that is something else; Will isn't sure he wants to find out what. The challenge from Hannibal is enough to make his palms sweat and tense, and he has to will his hands to unclench from fists. No doubt the older man notices. Will settles for silence as his response, feeling that silence could be the only true answer he can offer. What exactly does Will want? To capture Hannibal, his mind tells him, to right the wrongs in his life. But there is another part of Will's mind, one that tugs at the optic nerves of his eyes and gives him a headache, that tells him that what he wants is companionship with Hannibal. He isn't ready to capture the older man, not whilst he is still discovering himself. The bond between them is growing stronger and Will allows it; he needs it, craves it. Craves the acceptance that Hannibal offers him. Craves the stability that Hannibal is capable of reflecting onto Will. Perhaps what Will Graham understands is that if he cannot beat Hannibal Lecter, join him.

Hannibal drives Will to Freddie Lounds' hotel without another word on the conversation, having accepted the tense silence the two men had fallen into. The car rolls to a stop inside the parking lot of a small hotel building; a sign flashes above them signifying that the establishment is without vacancy. Will briefly wonders why Freddie does what she does; why she settles for her frowned-upon version of journalism whilst she sleeps in hotels and never anywhere stable. Which raises another question as to how Hannibal knew which hotel Freddie was staying in before he started the car. As the engine cuts off, Will becomes acutely aware of the loss of the noise made by the engine as a distraction from the other man beside him. Hannibal hasn't spoken up yet, and Will feels like he is on the edge of his seat. He undoes his seat belt but does not move to leave the vehicle. He opens his mouth to speak, but all that comes out is a harsh breath of air when Hannibal places his hand gently on Will's thigh.

"My intentions were not to make you feel afflicted, Will," Hannibal's voice is quiet, his accent only enhancing the sincerity of his words. Will does not look at Hannibal, and instead directs his gaze toward Hannibal's hand. It rests lightly on Will's lower thigh, low enough that it graces the top of Will's kneecap. The contact sends a ripple of electricity upward, travelling through Will's thigh and up into his stomach; he feels himself tense in response, body sensing impending danger. But his mind knows better; this is Hannibal and Hannibal has no reason to hurt Will. At least, no reason that he is aware of.

“Nor did I aim to pressure you by bringing your intentions into question,” Hannibal continues as Will keeps his gaze on the offending hand. Was this... an apology? For the questioning earlier; Will could understand where Hannibal was coming from. But there is no need for an apology. Perhaps Hannibal is just attempting one of his mind games with Will; that would give fair explanation to the hand on Will's thigh. An intimate gesture, for certain, and one that Will does not stop from happening. Hannibal's palm is warm against his thigh, radiating heat through his body until it reaches his chest. His head feels heavy; too many things to process at once. In absence of a response from Will, Hannibal's thumb begins to repeat a soft, back and forth motion against Will's kneecap. It is a gentle caress and it makes Will feel like the walls are closing in on him. He fights with himself; forcing himself to meet Hannibal's eyes. When he does, he immediately regrets the decision as Hannibal seems much closer than Will had assumed he would be. The car is in no way cramped, but it sure as hell feels that way.

Will exhales slowly and offers Hannibal a soft, one sided quirk of his lips. “No apology necessary. I was just a little,” he pauses, choosing his words carefully, over-pronouncing them, “overwhelmed.”

Hannibal appears to mull over Will's response, continuing to caress the other man's thigh with his thumb. After an excruciating moment, Hannibal nods softly. “Understandable. Jack Crawford is incredibly dismayed by this new development.”

Will nods back in response; finding comfort in the repetitive movements of Hannibal's fingertips on him. He briefly wonders what it would feel like against his skin, instead of over fabric, but pushes it back into a dark circle of his mind for another time. “I guess I'll hear about that one later.”

“I'd assume you will,” Hannibal confirms, keeping eye contact with the younger man for a long moment before looking toward the windscreen, hand still on the other man's leg.

“I,” Will starts, then pauses, collecting himself, “I should get going. Freddie will be expecting me.”

Hannibal nods, and withdraws his hand from Will's thigh. Immediately, and somewhat astonishingly, Will's body misses the contact. Misses the raw emotion channeled through Hannibal's hand and into Will's body; Will feels himself heat up at the thought.

“I'll,” Will says, having to stop to clear his throat as he opens the door to the car and takes a step out, “I'll let you know how it goes.”

Hannibal does not respond but his smugness is evident in his face as Will stumbles out of his car and closes the door behind him. Will is thankful for the harsh winter wind now, that's for sure. He watches as Hannibal pulls out from the parking lot and disappears down the street. As soon as he is out of view, Will grabs onto the railing of the motel stairway and catches his breath. This... this thing that he has with Hannibal has changed dynamic once more and Will isn't sure he can keep up. His thigh is still warm from where Hannibal had touched him; caressed him, like some type of lover. Or a pet. A protege. Will feels sick to his stomach; sick at the thought of Hannibal treating him like a pet, and sick at himself for the aching feeling inside his stomach for the contact again. Things have become a lot more challenging in the act of capturing Hannibal.

Inside one of the hotel rooms, Freddie Lounds observes Will from her window, one hand pulling the drape back in order to see him properly.

Chapter End Notes

You may note that there are a few things swapped around in this chapter compared to the actual events of Hannibal; one being that Will and Hannibal had already decorated the skeleton with Tier's corpse before Hannibal tended to Will's wounds. This is to help improve the narrative.

This chapter does not share the previous chapters length

The song is "Firewall" by Les Friction. It is meant to be understood from Will's POV, describing Hannibal.

Invitation Surveillé

Chapter Notes

Story title translation: Folie à Deux - Madness for two

Episode basis title translation: Naka Choko - a Japanese palate cleanser

Chapter title translation: Invitation Surveillé - A Guarded Invitation

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Chapter three - A Guarded Invitation *Chapitre trois - Invitation Surveillé*

Tied to a sorrow heart

Why does he want to bring me where he goes?

To find out the reasons why?

It's enough to make you wanna try for one last night

"You neglected to say "allegedly"," Will responds, voice calm and distant. He knows fine well that he had tried to kill Hannibal Lecter whilst trapped in that prison cell -- the prison cell that Hannibal had been responsible for putting him in. An attempt to one-up the doctor, and it had almost been successful had it not been for Alana Bloom figuring out his plans too soon. He was so sure he had won; that he had rid the world of a murderous beast that haunted his dreams and kept him awake at night. But that was too good to be true. Outside, a car passes on the street below and Will pushes his thoughts of he and Hannibal's exchange in the other man's car to the back of his mind.

"No, I didn't," Freddie replies with a brief shake of head, eyes on Will like he is some sort of specimen. She is analyzing him; poking him and prodding him to further comprehend him, but Will will not have that. It is enough to have a sociopathic and homicidal cannibal push and pull at his vulnerable psyche without the likes of Freddie Lounds attempting to do so.

"Hannibal Lecter is your psychiatrist again," Freddie notes, after getting no response from Will. He has resorted to pacing around the room, calm and calculating, attempting to sew back together the bits and pieces of his mind that Hannibal has managed to scramble. "What's up with that?"

Will almost scoffs at her disregard of the English language, but he restrains himself, "I was wrong about him; that's what's up with that." The mockery in his tone is evident, and Freddie registers it with a faint narrow of her eyes. Her eyelashes flutter onto her cheeks for the briefest of moments and it makes Will's skin crawl. The journalist had been ready and waiting for his arrival at her hotel room, having already opened the door before Will had had a chance to knock. Such behavior made Will feel uneasy; what was she up to?

"Maybe you were," Freddie responds after a small moment, but her body language does not make it seem like she believes Will, "Maybe you weren't."

A sharp need to protect Hannibal assaults Will and causes his fists to ball inside his coat. Behind him, he can feel the stag materialising; it forms a black and poisonous smoke around him that only he can see. But no; he cannot harm Freddie Lounds. At least, not yet. The opportunity must arise before he can act on his instincts. The stag, having fully formed, huffs out a short breath of impatience which Will ignores. Instead, he turns and angles his rigid body towards Freddie, who has still not moved from where she is seated in front of him. He regards her quietly for a long moment in attempts to read her face, her eyes; anything to help him further understand the way she thinks. "Doctor Chilton was the Chesapeake Ripper."

Freddie looks away in irritation, "The Chesapeake Ripper had surgical skills. Doctor Chilton did not."

Anger bubbles inside Will's stomach and the stag moves to stand with him, offering its overbearing heat as a comfort to him. Of course Freddie Lounds had not believed him about Hannibal when it had mattered. Now? Now it is too late; Freddie is too late and it will surely be lead to her downfall. Everyone has their time; Will understands that now. It is only a matter of when. "They had the same profile."

"Doctor Chilton was a woeful surgeon," Freddie responds, quick on Will's heels. Will realizes he has to be more firm with the woman; she doesn't seem to accept his outlandish responses, "dangerous, even. They say he fled to psychiatry to avoid embarrassment."

Will sinks down onto the opposite leather armchair from Freddie Lounds, but faces her as to not retreat from the obvious implication in her words. The stag moves behind the woman, hooves creating scuffs in the floor that Will knows aren't really there. It is prepared to attack; aims to kill -- to end the conversation that Will does not want to be a part of. One that he does not want to listen to any longer. But, no. He has to play along. Regardless of what the cannibal has done, Will feels a strong sense of loyalty to him which fuels him to remain in the conversation. He must defend Hannibal Lecter; he must play the part which Jack Crawford intends for him to play. Freddie Lounds is still in the dark, and Will intends to keep it that way.

"My story with the Chesapeake Ripper already has an ending, Freddie," Will states, eyes hard on the red-headed woman in front of him. It is true; the story does have an ending. Hannibal getting away with being a serial killer and Will Graham having no choice but to capitulate to him. But what the world - and more categorically, Freddie Lounds - isn't aware of is that this story has a sequel. A dolorous and repetitive tale of atrocity that Will holds in his hands and bears complete control over; but that control is dwindling and spiraling in and out of consciousness. Hannibal has seized the quill right out from under Will's hand and stored it away, somewhere Will isn't sure he is ready to go yet. Soon, maybe; not now. Not whilst his mind is feeling as decrepit as an old mug.

Freddie watches him intently and with scrutiny, and Will can hear the cogs turn in her head, "Yet, your story with Hannibal Lecter begins a new chapter."

Will blinks numerous times in confusion at what the woman has said. One story ends and another begins; it is somewhat poetic. Despite both stories being works of fictions; or rather, a fabrication of reality. "Tell me, Freddie," Will begins, shifting further back on the chair and interlocking his fingers in front of him to hinder their shaking, "Which story are you writing, exactly? My involvement with the Chesapeake Ripper," he pauses deliberately, then adds, "or my involvement with Hannibal Lecter?"

Freddie's eyes seem to have a sparkle in them at Will's response, and for a moment he fears he has said too much, but the woman then mirrors Will's position on her own chair. She leans forward and rests her elbows on her knees, "Arguably the same story."

Will's nostrils flare and he looks away, briefly angered by this advancement which has seemed to bite him in the ass. One quick snap of his fingers would be all it would take for the stag to act; for him to wrap his firm hands around her throat and choke her to death. A death to the infamous Freddie Lounds; he is sure he would receive praise from a copious amount of people from inside prison. Will's lack of response is enough to urge Freddie further.

"How much time do you spend with Hannibal Lecter?" Freddie asks quietly. Will hesitates for a moment, judging his own response. How much time does he spend with the psychiatrist? An amount he doesn't want to admit.

"We have scheduled appointments," Will offers, and does not say anything else.

"Scheduled appointments before dawn?"

Will blinks at her question, confused.

"I watched as you both arrived at the hotel," Freddie explains, and she gets the reaction she is waiting for when Will tenses up at the thought of Freddie observing he and Hannibal's exchange. A brief glance at the watch on her thin wrist confirms that it is still very early in the day, "Evidently, you two were together prior to our interview."

Will clears his throat, having gained some of his composure from the discussion. If she had witnessed he and Hannibal pull up to the hotel then she had surely watched the scene unfold before her; Hannibal's hand caressing Will's thigh, and Will's reaction after Hannibal had driven away. Both are not ideal predicaments to be caught in by Freddie Lounds. Will offers a small turn of his head at her words, maintaining his stiff posture, "We were with Jack Crawford, I'm sure you understand."

The spite is evident in Will's words, and for a moment he believes he has been victorious in he and the red-head's verbal spar. But the victory is short lived when Freddie glances to the side, then returns her gaze back to Will, eyes hard. Wordlessly, and without effort, she moves and places her hand upon Will's thigh; it is identical to the gesture Hannibal had done prior. However, this time it feels different; it feels wrong. It feels like an intrusion that Will does not appreciate, and it is evident in the way that the stag huffs and trots its front legs in anger behind Freddie. Will has stiffened visibly; debilitatingly uncomfortable by the gesture.

"I think I'm beginning to understand something, that's for certain," Freddie says with an edge of threat to her voice, but there's also something else. Something identifiable as curiosity; or

perhaps amazement, but Will cannot be sure. All he can be sure of is how vigorously he wants Freddie to release him. He moves his own hand over hers and grips at it, forcibly removing it from his lap. She snatches it away almost instantly, seemingly sensing danger in Will's gaze. Her eyes are striking and wide as she puts distance between herself and the man before her.

Will breathes heavily; the stag whinnies for his attention but he does not grant it as much. The room feels smaller; the walls are closing in around Will Graham and he has to act before they consume him. He looks at Freddie, voice calm and steady; but the threat is there. "Please refrain from doing that again."

Freddie's face contorts from mild fear to suspicion, and she looks away from the man before up and towards the window. Will rises to his feet and tightens his scarf around his neck once more, preparing to leave. "I think it's time I left."

Freddie hums in response and does not move as Will proceeds to the door. Before he opens it, he hears Freddie's voice from behind him, "Same time next week?"

Will doesn't respond, leaving the hotel room and advancing into the harsh wind, closing the door behind him.



The bitter wind does not burden Alana Bloom whilst she walks to her car, wrapped tightly in a bright red coat which clings to her elegant form. No; it is Freddie Lounds who has decided to burden her, having slithered her way into the teaching grounds and waited for the doctor to emerge from the building. Once Alana has made her way through a small archway and into a large courtyard decorated in snow, Freddie Lounds is hot on her heels.

"I've always admired teachers," Freddie says, making her presence known and injecting herself into Alana's thoughts and personal space, "Molding impressionable young minds. But you can only learn so much and live."

Alana has the face of someone who does not want to handle this today, and it would be correct. She has more pressing matters to attend to, such as grading papers and distracting her mind from thoughts of Hannibal Lecter, whose home she had stayed at the night before.

"No one likes a know-it-all, Freddie," Alana remarks, breath creating vapor in the air, nothing but venom in her words. She does not slow her pace to allow the younger woman to keep up with her. But, she does, much to Alana's dismay.

"Hannibal Lecter taught you when you were an impressionable young mind," Freddie continues as if Bloom has not spoken, keeping her body language guarded. She hides her hands in her pockets, one hanging on securely to her voice recorder. She is recording their conversation, but she does not expect Alana Bloom to have anything compelling to say that Freddie Lounds does not already know. And after this mornings interview with Will Graham,

Freddie feels like she has caught a glimpse of something no one else has seen. And, truth be told, it scares her to the core.

"Your book is about Will Graham," Alana reminds her, a sigh in her words as they continue their hurried stroll to her car, "Not about me."

"Were you sleeping with Hannibal Lecter when you were his student or is that a recent development?" Freddie asks, and watches as Alana's jaw tenses under the scrutiny, "Oh, you are sleeping with him. I was just guessing."

Alana could strike the woman next to her and rid her of the burden for the day, but she restrains herself, having considered the influence it would have on her students. It is true; she is sleeping with Hannibal, but it does not interfere with her professional life nor their professional relationship. She had found Hannibal Lecter an extremely charming and intimidating man back when she was simply a student; a young and indeed impressionable mind prepared for the likes of a pulchritudinous psychiatrist like Hannibal to sweep her off her feet.

"I figured you had to be sleeping with one of them," Freddie continues, her words causing Alana to stop mid-step and turn toward Freddie with cold eyes, "Maybe that's why you can't see it."

The implications of Freddie's words strike a nerve in Alana who fights hard not to spit her words at the young journalist, "See what?"

Freddie has stopped in her tracks and now faces Bloom with nothing but scepticism on her face. She fights a shiver as snow seeps into her boot after having skidded to a halt in front of the other woman, but it does nothing but harden her resolve, "Will Graham was right about Hannibal Lecter," She says, then pauses deliberately before saying, "And I was right about Will Graham."

Alana does nothing but grit her teeth in response, "I'm not having this," she starts, looking the other woman up and down; judging the pariah amongst social journalists, "or any other conversation with you, Freddie." Without a further word, Alana walks away from the other woman, irritation evident in the tensing of her shoulders. A few students nearby are peering at the exchange between the two women; eavesdropping, no doubt. The last thing Alana wants is to be the topic of gossip among her students, but after her run-in with Freddie it seems there is no adequate way to avoid it.

"Doctor Lecter had the highest number of deceased patients in the country," Freddie says, louder as she follows Alana Bloom without further thought. Alana's outburst did nothing to dismay her and her determination to help Alana understand the situation. If she has to be rude about it, she will; she has plenty of practice at being unethical in the name of journalism. "But then there's Will Graham; he tried to kill him. And now they're back in therapy together, another former patient is dead."

The implication in Freddie's words, paired with the impish look on her thin face causes Alana to stop in front of her car and spin towards the other woman. "Will understands that Hannibal Lecter can help him."

“Maybe what Will understands is, if you can't beat Hannibal Lecter,” Freddie pauses, eyeing Alana hard, “join him.”

Alana turns around, showing her back to Freddie Lounds as she scoffs and climbs into the driver's side of her car. In her eyes, Will Graham is not a killer. At least, not an intentional one. And to hear Hannibal being accused by the likes of Freddie Lounds twisted the knife deeper and deeper into her skull; she has her own suspicions about the two men. There had always been an aspect of secrecy; some form of wall between her and Hannibal. Something preventing her from seeing him for who he truly is. Yet, Will Graham seems to know Hannibal from head to toe, from body language to verbal metaphor. It is jealousy, she identifies, pooling in her stomach and flooding her chest; in its rawest form.

Freddie is persistent enough to knock Alana's window, to which she rolls it down to humor the younger woman. The expression on the red-head's face causes Alana's confidence to falter.

“I had an interview with Will this morning,” Freddie says, leaning on arm on the edge of the door to speak in a hushed tone at Alana. “If you aren't going to believe me, why don't you take a look at the way Will and Doctor Lecter regard each other? Their familiarity is...” Freddie pauses and looks towards a group of students gathering to her left, “It is resemblant of a courtship.”

Alana's brow furrows at Freddie, the jealousy in her stomach disappearing, “What are you saying, Freddie?”

“I'm saying that Will and Hannibal are more devoted to one another than you think.”

Alana watches Freddie for a long moment before shaking her head and rolling her window back up all the way. The action causes the younger woman to shrink back and take a step away from the car. Alana does not spare Freddie a glance as she puts the car in gear and gets the hell out of there. Freddie's words have chilled her to the bone. Alana knows that Will and Hannibal are close, perhaps closer than she'd comfortably like, but Freddie has given her something to consider on a whole other level. Devotion of patients to their psychiatrists is a common trait throughout practices, but Alana is smart enough to understand that that is not what Freddie Lounds meant. But, believing is seeing.



In the mind's eye, Will Graham envisions himself standing in a river of ice cold water. It rises to his calves and seeps into his boots; a blackness consuming his feet and rooting him in place until he can no longer feel his toes. The stream feels tenacious and unyielding; it is enough to make him feel like he is already drowning. Water engulfs his lungs and halts his breathing; he thrashes at his own throat to tear it apart, raking finger nails into his skin and drawing blood. He can't breathe.

Beyond him, a figure emerges from the blackness of the water engulfed in a dark smoke. It is his stag, in all of its beauty and its grace, standing tall and true and simply observing him.

Observing his panic and observing his death; it does not move to help him. It does not rush to his aid; it does nothing but stand and stare and breathe the air that Will so desperately craves. Along the river bank, Will can envision the ones he loves. Jack's face is one of disappointment, but Alana seems as though she has been crying, tears dried upon her rosy cheeks. Abigail stands separate and simply smiles at Will's deteriorating form. None of them move to his aid, and Will becomes cognizant of his own loneliness. Waves of shock tear through Will's body as his body begins to shut down; it seizes up limbs it does not prioritize and leaves Will limp, still rooted standing in place. He is trapped and helpless and in the end, he welcomes the fusillade of death and decay.

The stag transforms into a hybrid; a mixture between man and beast. An onyx creature Will can only see in his nightmares, yet the only one who moves to his aid. It feels like looking into a mirror. A final reminder in death that Will is a monster; it seems fitting, but it does not last as the creature before him embraces him. It pulls Will's frail figure against its body and squeezes until Will can see stars behind his eyelids. Water churns in his lungs and forcibly ejects itself from his body and Will can breathe once more. He clutches to the beast in gratitude; his beast was loyal after all. Will Graham is no longer alone.



Will Graham cannot blame anything else but his own footsteps for leading him to Hannibal Lecter's door. It is cold and he is wet, from the snow in his hair and the sweat on his palms, under the accommodating roof of Lecter's front porch. His mind has been racing for the entirety of the day, unable to stop or slow down, unable to pace himself. Jack Crawford had scolded Will into next Tuesday regarding the fate of the *Tier kid*, as he had put it. Jack had talked down to Will as if he hadn't anything better to do with his afternoon; he had spoken as though Will was not aware of the implication of murderous tenancies Randall Tier's death had on Will's case file. Or the effect it had on his mental state. Will only remembers the conversation in segments. Jack's clean palms pressing onto his desk in anger, Will's tarnished hands retreating into coat pockets, beads of sweat seeping into eyelids like poison, a knock at the door, once, twice, a third time until it is answered and Will is able to sneak out of the room and out of the building. His feet knew where they were taking him long before his mind did.

The hold on Will that Hannibal has is like quick sand; the more Will struggles to find a peaceful reality, the more likely he is to involve Hannibal in that reality. Will cannot live without Hannibal Lecter and he knows it, but whether he can come to terms with what that means for himself, is something else entirely. Hannibal and Will cannot exist in a way that would suit either of them, with Jack Crawford and Alana Bloom hot on their heels, and Freddie Lounds sniffing her way into their business like a common mutt. Hannibal answers the door before Will has time to realize he had been knocking it. The surprise in the doctor's face is quickly and cleverly masked by content, clearly pleased to see the younger man.

“Will,” Hannibal says, in the same voice he always uses that melts Will's bones, “What a pleasant surprise. Please come inside.”

“Thank you,” Will is hasty in his entrance, embarrassment evident in the way he holds his shoulders. His coat is soaked and his hair is matted to his forehead with the weather, and Hannibal seems to smile at Will's distress as he shrugs out of his overcoat.

“Allow me,” Hannibal offers, a hand on the fabric over Will's shoulder as he assists the younger man on removing the garment. As he is patting the coat down and placing it over his forearm, neatly folded, Hannibal says, “I had not expected your company.”

Will nods slowly, a little unsure of how to respond. He fidgets with the belt loop of his pants and pushes his wet hair away from his face. After their exchange in the car earlier in the morning, Will feels like he has to be on his toes. Or at least, more alert than he usually is around Doctor Lecter. The game between them has begun its second round, and Will is intent to win this one, but he isn't holding his breath for what seems impossible. But he is prepared to give it his best.

“Yes, I,” Will starts, then pauses as he gathers himself and looks at Hannibal for the first time. The older man looks like he always does, finding comfort in repetition. It eases Will's racing mind for the first time in hours. “I'm sorry to just appear unannounced. I'm sure you have things to do.”

“On the contrary, I'm pleased you came.” Hannibal says with something in his eyes that Will has trouble trying to read. He follows the cannibal into the living room and watches as the man disappears to hang up Will's overcoat. Standing alone in Hannibal's living room is overwhelming without the support the other man provides to Will. He observes the artwork decorating the far wall, positioned perfectly above the fireplace, giving the room an elegant feel. Will feels inadequate; his small farm house in the middle of Wolftrap could not compare to Hannibal's over-sized home. Will isn't sure which he prefers; small rather empty, populated by his furry friends, or large and obnoxiously decorated, populated by Hannibal.

As if announced, Hannibal re-enters the room where Will is standing, now positioned by the fire place as he attempts to warm his hands from the cold walk. Hannibal makes his way towards Will and steps around him to reach the small tray of alcohol to Will's left.

“May I interest you in a drink?” Hannibal asks, voice dripping in hospitality that makes Will's head swim. He doesn't feel like drowning himself in his thoughts any longer.

“Please,” Will responds and straightens his back so Hannibal can move freely. He watches as the older man pours two glasses of what is presumably whiskey with precision. Will briefly wonders if Hannibal has ever spilled anything; if he has ever spilled wine onto a cream carpet or a white dress shirt. He doubts it; Hannibal definitely is not the reckless type, he isn't like Will. Or at least, the old Will Graham. Not this newly constructed Will Graham who is Hannibal's friend in all of this. Will is thankful when Hannibal hands him a glass, and takes one for himself.

“Have a seat,” Hannibal says, waiting for Will to sit in a small, green armchair before taking a seat himself in an identical chair adjacent to him. He swirls his whiskey in his left hand, observing Will from where he sits. After a small, excruciating moment, he says, “Are you alright, Will?”

Will hesitates at Hannibal's question, struggling to find his words. No, he is certainly not alright. He is certainly not alright with the turn of events, with the feelings in his mind and in his heart circulating around Hannibal. He is not alright with the way the older man makes him feel, and he is not alright with the other man touching him. Or maybe he is, but he can't admit it. Not yet, not with so much at stake. In a weak voice, Will replies, "Freddie Lounds made an advancement toward me today."

Hannibal turns his head to the side with a small frown on his lips. "What sort of advancement?"

"A romantic one, if I'm not mistaken," Will answers slowly, judging Hannibal's reaction. If he can get some form of reaction out of Hannibal then he will be able to assess the other man's intentions. And perhaps his feelings towards Will that aren't already out on the table. Hannibal is a hard man to read, among other things, and right now is not any different. Will can sense Hannibal's distaste from where he sits, but there isn't much else to go with. He pries more, "She caressed my thigh in the middle of our interview."

"Perhaps it was a journalistic technique?" Hannibal offers, then takes a small sip of his drink. Will's eyes wander to Hannibal's free hand, resting on his own knee from where he has crossed his legs over one another. He remembers the heat, the electricity flowing through him at the other man's touch. He considers it to be a fluke; his body's reaction in surprise of the contact, but his thoughts are curious enough to wonder if it is something else entirely. But Will regretfully knows what they say about curiosity. He has to be careful. "A deplorable attempt to extract more information from you."

"I had considered that," Will replies, wondering if Hannibal has noticed the parallel of his caress and Freddie's caress. No doubt he has, but he is remaining silent on the matter. Will fights the urge to suck his teeth and settles for taking a hefty sip of his whiskey. Hannibal is watching the flames crackle in the fireplace, allowing the flickering orange light assault his facial features and cause a tightening in Will's gut.

"What exactly did you and Freddie Lounds talk about?" Hannibal asks suddenly, after Will was certain their conversation was over. Hannibal's finger is tracing the rim of his glass and his gaze remains averted, but Will notices a stiffness in his shoulders. It is miss-able, but not by Will.

"You." Will says simply, and enjoys the way Hannibal's jaw tightens. "She had a lot to say about you."

"I can only imagine," Hannibal says, and leads Will to think the conversation is over, but then says, "And discussing myself led to her touching you?"

"More or less," Will said, reading Hannibal's face which had now turned toward Will. His eyes were cold and hard, illuminated by flames. "Perhaps it is you she is interested in."

"Let us hope not." Hannibal offers a smile, which Will returns. Hannibal places his half finished glass down onto the drinks tray and uncrosses his legs. "I am actually expecting company for dinner this evening."

Will's face falls as he rises to his feet when Hannibal does. Hannibal takes the empty glass from Will's hand and places it onto the drinks tray with his own, a small quirk on his lips which draws Will's attention.

"I'll get out of your way." Will says, attempting to mask his disappointment. Hannibal's expression changes momentarily.

"Won't you stay for dinner?"

Not if long pig is the main course, Will aches to say. But he refrains from it, and instead clears his throat and asks, "Whose company are you expecting?"

"Why, Alana's." Hannibal offers a small smile, and Will's eyes harden. Of course it's Alana he is dining with, of course it is. Hannibal's newest pet. He has everybody fooled. The thought of them together sickens Will to the core and makes his palms sweaty, a sense of possession washing over him. But for whom, he can't be sure. Hannibal seems to sense Will's hostility, and backs off slightly, taking a step away from Will. If only Alana had listened to Will when it really mattered; now, now she would get herself killed. Or worse; killed and consumed. Will is betting on the latter. She would be a delicate and sweet pig on Hannibal's plate. Astonishingly, the thought causes Will to salivate, and he makes a point of swallowing in distaste at himself.



"Brined and roasted whole suckling pig." Hannibal announces as he wheels a small cart decorated with tonight's meal. Boasting about his creations, his dishes, it is a trait Will recognises from the Ripper. If only he had clicked sooner. If only he hadn't been blinded by the feeling of belonging, and the feeling of acceptance from another in his fragile mental state. Maybe things would be different now, and maybe he would be enjoying his dogs somewhere near the sea; somewhere where he could fish in peace and not concern himself with a cannibal. Will watches Alana as Hannibal enters, interrupting their arguably awkward silence with their main course. Alana Bloom is beautiful in every shape and every form; Will is painfully aware of her beauty, even now, caught in Hannibal's web, he cannot deny her her elegance.

"A gift from a friend," Hannibal continues as he serves a small portion of pork onto Alana's plate. Will watches as she offers a small, intimate smile to Hannibal which Will would have longed for a long time ago. Not now. Not whilst she was sleeping with the cannibal.

"A friend of yours, not a friend of the pig's." Will remarks, not entirely meaning to voice his thoughts. Alana straightens as she returns to looking back at Will with a solemn face. Will knows Hannibal can feel the tension at the table.

"There are those who raise livestock and have a genuine affection for them." Hannibal remarks, eyes on Will who returns the gaze, breaking he and Alana's silent conversation. Will is grateful he will actually be consuming pig as opposed to long pig. "The farmer who hand rears lambs loves them and sends them to slaughter."

Will could scoff at Hannibal's words. He had already sent Will to slaughter; he had sent him to the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. But in the end, Hannibal's love or his own loneliness aided Will's release.

"They love and kill what they love." Alana says, watching Hannibal with a gaze that Will doesn't understand. It angers him that the two of them could have a private conversation without him; he was used to doing such with Hannibal. Perhaps he had thought himself too special. Hannibal is sleeping with Alana, after all, but she will never understand Hannibal as Will does.

"And eat what they love." Hannibal responds, back turned to both of them. Will tries not to roll his eyes, feeling like he's in on the joke and hating it. "It's a paradox."

Alana appears to hesitate, looking down at her plate and pursing her lips. Hannibal notices, too, as he takes his place at the table. Alana speaks, her voice small but strong, "Freddie Lounds thinks the two of you are a paradox."

Will looks down at his own plate, mirroring Alana's posture in attempts to run away from this. Run away from lying to her. But he can't and he knows it, he has to brave face it. He has to keep up his performance; a performance quickly becoming less of an act and more of a way of life. Hannibal does not respond instantly, seemingly waiting for Alana to elaborate.

"She sees something no one else sees," Alana says, and it leaves a questionable taste in Will's mouth. Freddie sees something, that's for sure. But Alana can't know what. Unless... the possibility of Freddie Lounds contacting Alana this afternoon creeps into Will's mind like a stampede of furious thoughts. Had Freddie mentioned he and Hannibal's exchange in the car to Alana?

"What's that?" Will asks quickly, looking everywhere but at Alana. Hannibal senses Will's discomfort, evidently sharing his train of thought, and spares Will a glance. Alana is yet to touch her food.

"That neither of you is the killer she's writing about," Alana says, hesitating once more, before adding, "but together, you might be."

Will notes her emphasis on *together* with distaste. Freddie Lounds has contacted Alana, that much is evident. Fire burns through Will's stomach and rises in his windpipe, making it hard to breathe. Will shifts in his seat and forks a piece of meat and places it into his mouth, attempting to chew at a reasonable pace.

"Freddie Lounds must consider you a bland interview subject if she has already resorted to fiction." Hannibal says in his ear, and Will looks at him with a helpless glance. Hannibal registers the discomfort in the short second of their exchange and knowing it makes Will relax an ounce. There is a brief brush against Will's leg under the table, and he passes it off as an accidental contact, but when it happens again, Will's careful and measured chewing falters. Hannibal's knee is flush against Will's, providing a small yet purposeful bodily contact which Will loses himself to. The contact sends a calming wave along Will's thigh and into his gut where it settles. Hannibal's eyes remain on Will for a small moment until Will looks away, accepting the contact. If this is how Hannibal wants to play it, then Will shall comply.

"She won't be fenced in by something as malleable as the truth." Alana says, taking a small piece of food into her mouth, seeming to relax at Hannibal's response. "Freddie has no boundaries."

"Someone with no boundaries is a psychopath." Will states, an offering for Hannibal to take, as he attempts to calm himself. He chews with intent and focuses on the pattern of his plate, admiring the twisting and turning of intricate webbing around the rim. "Or a journalist."

Will's stab at Freddie Lounds does not go unnoticed at the dining table, and only heightens tension. Hannibal's knee nudges him gently in warning, just threatening enough to make Will back off with his cruel remarks towards the social media pariah. Alana's face seems solemn, and it is a distasteful look for someone so beautiful, Will thinks. But no, he has to stay focused on Hannibal; it is the man at the table whose attention he seeks, not the woman's.

"Freddie isn't the only one without boundaries." Alana responds, taking Will back with the tone of her words. Hannibal turns to her with a curious look, edging Alana to continue. She has paused consuming her meal to chew in thought, then says, "Your relationship doesn't seem to know many."

Will bites his cheek and tastes the familiarity of blood swirling around his tongue. Of course Freddie Lounds had mentioned her observed exchange between he and Hannibal, and of course, Will had been foolish enough to do nothing about it and let it manifest into the problem it is now.

"Patient and therapist," Alana says, then pauses with intent, eyes focusing on Hannibal in a way that makes Will's stomach churn, "friend and enemy. Courtship."

Will's mind tells him to run, to flee the room of this conversation and rid himself of it over a few piping hot showers, but he cannot make a scene. He can only dwell on the implication of Alana's wording; a courtship of a sort, true, but nothing romantic. Yet, Will reminds himself, if his thoughts are correct. Hannibal is fast to retort Alana's statement.

"Crossing boundaries is different than violating them," He replies politely, taking care in slicing the meat before him with a steady hand. Will takes the moment to test the cannibal in a moment of blind confidence and faith, and rubs his leg against the other man's as gentle as he can as to not rise suspicion of his movements to the table. He watches as Hannibal's fingers tense around his silverware, his leg going momentarily rigid at the contact, before relaxing into the contact Will is offering. Will's thigh begins to tingle.

"Boundaries will always be subject to negotiation." Alana replies, seemingly unaware of the physical contact centimeters away from her under the cover of the table before them. She looks at Will pleadingly, mind whispering *I'm listening to you now, Will* but Will is too far gone to heed her plea. Alana Bloom had her chance and missed it; she waved as it passed by, and Will cannot forget it. His loyalties now lie elsewhere. Lecter's hands move to his pristine napkin to pat down his fingers, seemingly about to rise from his chair when Alana speaks again, "It's just hard to know where you are with each other."

"We know where we are with each other," Will replies hastily, albeit harsh yet soft with his tone. In an instant, Hannibal's eyes look to Will as the other man smiles at Alana, offering

Hannibal a small glance. There is a question in his eyes; *do we?* Will sure as hell doesn't know where he and Lecter stand, but Alana doesn't need to know it. What she doesn't know won't kill her. Fingertips ghost the edge of Will's knee, breath hitching in his throat at the contact. Will has never been so acutely aware of how gentle the cannibal before him can be, especially with someone whom he regards so highly. Will feels something well in his heart, swelling and consuming him in one short burst. He can't tear himself away from Hannibal now. "Shouldn't that be enough?"

Hannibal offers a small, yet sly smile to Alana who does her best not to suck her teeth in response. He says, with a small pinch of pride, "Better the devil you know."

Hannibal has to do something about the boorish Freddie Lounds.



Freddie Lounds is calm and collected on her drive to Will Graham's cottage in the middle of nowhere, far away from anything and everything. Dogs bark, but there is no sound of the serial killer she has arrived to interview. He is with Hannibal Lecter, no doubt, and Freddie takes it upon herself to break into Will's shed with a lock pick. The shed is large and customary for a farm house, but its decorations are what stops Lounds in her tracks, snow falling from the creases in her small boots. Hanging high above her is a skeleton of sorts, similar to a beast; the beast of Randall Tier's imagination. Freddie is smart enough to recognize it and snap a photograph without thinking, pulling a small, silver and dated camera out of her purse. This would make for an interesting story, and implicate Will Graham entirely.

She has what she needs, but curiosity fuels her searching as she stumbles across a small freezer. If Will Graham is truly what she thinks, she should find human flesh there. Or something worse. If there could be anything worse than the thought of eating another human being; Lounds herself cannot eat as much as an animal, never mind a human. Inside the freezer is copious numbers of fish wrapped in fine plastic bags, stored for feeding, but Freddie fishes down deep with complete disregard to trespassing. Her hands graze over a solid piece of bone which she takes into both of her hands and holds up to her face, breath exiting her lungs in a cloud of vapor before her. Petrified, she holds the broken and crumbling jaw of a human being, Randall Tier, no doubt. A trophy, she knows it. She drops the jaw in fright, wiping her hands frantically on her coat to rid herself of the feeling, before slamming the freezer lid closed.

Will Graham stands at the doorway where Freddie entered wrapped in a coat and scarf, half hidden behind a thin plastic sheet hanging from a wooden support beam above their heads. She starts when she spots him, hands shaking and whimpering echoing in her throat. Will does not move, simply stands inhumanely still and observes her; she gets the message. She is not meant to be here, this place is his. In a fear for her life, Freddie stumbles backwards, hands frantically grabbing her purse and pulling out a small, hand-sized pistol from it. Will Graham does nothing but close the door behind him, blocking the only exit to safety.

"You and Hannibal are..." Freddie attempts to piece together her scrambling thoughts as the gun shakes between her palms and Will Graham advances towards her. His face gives nothing away, and in that moment, Freddie can't tell the difference between him and Doctor Lecter; it is a both terrifying and interesting predicament she finds herself in, harsh footsteps becoming louder with every step Will takes, completely comfortable with the gun on him.

"Are?" He asks, hair framed around his face and blending into week old stubble which harshen his face. Freddie is in grave danger; this man, this monster is going to kill her. When she doesn't respond, Will speaks again, footsteps slow and steady, calculated and cautious, "Your interest in my psychiatrist and I is becoming an inconvenience, Freddie."

"Hannibal Lecter isn't only your psychiatrist, is he?" Freddie's voice shakes as she backs up from Will, turning her steps to the left around the freezer containing the most disastrous evidence she could have come across. Will's footsteps falter momentarily at her response; it appears to agitate him, anger him, and cause some kind of internal arm wrestle with fate. His breath does not make puffs of vapor in front of him like Freddie's does. "You're his accomplice. His partner. In all forms of the word."

Will Graham offers a small, knowing smile, neither confirming or denying Freddie's words. But no answer is answer enough for the red head. "I can't let you go, Freddie."

Freddie Lounds open fires on Will, who ducks and does a quick maneuver over the freezer to cover. The bullet raises splinters off the wooden wall, narrowly missing Will as Freddie takes her chance and flees, but Will is hot on her heels, breathing down her neck with hot, moist air which makes Freddie feel nauseous. He has a fist full of her hair, the gun in her hand fires once, twice, until she drops it under the steel grip of the murderer behind her. She sprays him with pepper spray, handicapping her attacker briefly as she shoulders open the door of the shed and makes a run for it, stumbling through the snow.

White assaults her vision, dilating her pupils and sending sharp pains throughout her skull. She makes it to her car, no sign of Will, fumbling with her cell phone as she dials for the only person who will listen; Jack Crawford. It beeps for the voicemail, and that's when the side window shatters inward at Freddie, spraying broken glass over her and her car and revealing Will Graham swinging an iron bar. Freddie screams as she is yanked violently out of the car, leaving her cell phone behind, screaming into the air to no one who is listening.



The tortured and amusing screams of Freddie Lounds echo in Will Graham's mind, bringing a soft smile across his face from where he stands with Hannibal in the older man's kitchen. He had driven to his accomplice and partner's home a few hours after the exchange between he and Jack Crawford, who was equally as amazed and horrified at Will. They had no leads on Freddie, and Will is intent on keeping it that way until he can decide what to do with Ms Lounds.

“It did not occur to me that I would have company for dinner tonight.” Hannibal says from where he dries his palms on a small dish cloth, then folds it neatly and places it on the counter by his side. He has a smile, but it is guarded, and Will aches to make it genuine. He has stripped from his suit jacket, leaving him in nothing but a patterned waistcoat, white shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows, revealing firm and capable forearms.

“I apologize for the unexpected visit, but I thought it would ruin the surprise.” Will responds, not really hearing his own words and unaware of vocalizing thoughts buried deep inside his mind. Hannibal's face relaxes slightly, and Will takes it as an invitation to continue. He lays out some ingredients onto the counter from a small, brown paper bag he had brought in the car with him. He is organizing his groceries on the counter as Hannibal looks on. Onions, assorted bell peppers, garlic cloves, tomatoes, potatoes and ginger are ready for prep. A wax paper wrapped package is placed on a worktop, like a gift; Will's gift to Hannibal. “I provide the ingredients, you tell me what we should do with them.”

“What's the meat?” Hannibal asks, eyes betraying his speech, letting Will understand that Hannibal knows fine well what the meat is. But he wants to hear Will say it. The younger man pushes the package towards Hannibal on the counter and looks to the side.

“What do you think?”

Hannibal smiles at that and cuts the string and unrolls the paper to reveal a small loin on meat. Long and slim. He bends and smells it, then looks up at Will with a smile, because he knows what this is. He looks proud, and Will feels nauseous, but it passes.

“Veal?” Hannibal asks, “Pork, perhaps?”

“She was a slim and delicate pig.”

Hannibal pauses, then licks his lips, causing Will to focus on them for an embarrassing moment. “I'll make *lomo saltado*. We'll make it together.”

Together, of course. Will hides his distaste with a small smile, a small upturn of the corner of his lips. Hannibal's hesitation is evident in the way he takes a knife from its holder and holds it out for Will. Their fingers brush as Will takes it from the other man's hand, a jolt of electricity surging through him and almost making him drop the fine silverware. Hannibal holds onto Will's hand a moment longer.

“Do you still think I want to kill you, Doctor Lecter?” Will asks, both of their hands on the knife. Will holds the older man's fate in his hands and could end it all right here and there, slice open the cannibal's throat and bask in the arterial spray of freedom. But, no, it doesn't settle in his stomach, and Hannibal's gaze softens.

“Do not mistake my pause for hesitation, Will,” Hannibal remarks, then removes his hand from the knife, the warmth of his fingertips now absent from Will's palm. “I was simply prolonging our contact.”

Will looks away instantly, feeling himself heat up from the inside out. A confirmation, at least, a confirmation of some sort. Hannibal enjoys their contact as much as Will, and

probably more. It is something; a development, and something that Will cannot ignore.

“No need to prolong contact,” Will says, and uses his last strain of self-discipline and control to not drop the knife in his hand as he begins the task of slicing the ginger. “Consider it a guarded invitation.”

An open invitation for physical contact; Will does his best to seem un-fazed by the turn of events, but he is well aware he falters and Hannibal notes it, but it doesn't seem to sadden the older man. Hannibal smiles and together they prepare the meal of the hour.

Chapter End Notes

The song is "One Last Night" by Vaults and it is meant to be said from Will's POV.

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